The LISTENING HEART

By JOHN A. KERN

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THE LISTENING HEART

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A Book of Devotional Interpretations

BY

JOHN A. KERN

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Is it that God is silent
or that we are listless?

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To
KATRINA KERN
and the memory of
another

Not to ease and aimless quiet
  Doth the inward answer tend,
But to works of love and duty
  As our being's end.

Not to idle dreams and fancies,
  Length of face and solemn tone,
But by Faith, in daily striving
  And performance shown.

—*Whittier*

PREFACE

Not without hesitation may one seek, with either spoken or written words, to enter into the devotional life of others. It is to ask admission into the most holy place of a brother's soul. Yet has not God bidden us even so to help each other? It was freely done by psalmists and prophets in their time, and by Christians of the early Church. It is done in any meeting for Christian social worship to-day. Otherwise that life-sharing which is of the very essence of the religion of Jesus would be incomplete.

This little book ventures to offer, as suggestions for the hour of prayer, an interpretation of certain Scripture passages. The text is not used as a pretext. To set forth in devotional form some real aspect of the truth it contains is in each instance the aim.

No one, it is hoped, will take such meditations as, either directly or indirectly, professions of personal goodness. Yet they must needs be, in large measure, confessional of personal faith and experience.

The title of the book is taken from its leading idea, which is present throughout and from time to time comes into distinct expression.

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GOD'S FIRST WORD

"Before they call, I will answer."—*Isa. lxv.* 24.

Contextual reading, vv. 17-25.

Not only will it be so when the kingdom of God shall have come in the glory foreseen in prophetic vision, but it is so here and now.

The answer to a spoken prayer is not God's first word in the soul. The sense of need which accompanies and even goes before the cry for help is also from Him. The hunger for righteousness, the spiritual unrest, the divine discontent, which as yet has found no language—it is in-breathed by His own Spirit. Then the prayer which follows is God's voice no less truly than ours. Unless He first came to us, we should never arise and come to Him. God of our life, we thank Thee for that consciousness of spiritual need and longing, however ill understood, which is Thy first great word in the soul. Speak, Lord, Thou who dost inspire what Thou Thyself wouldst hear, and waken in us the voice of prayer. So shall it indeed be true that before we call Thou hast answered.

THE MESSAGE OF THE MORNING

"Cause me to hear Thy loving kindness in the morning,
For in Thee do I trust."—*Psa. cxliii.* 8.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

To awake in peace out of the dreamy unconsciousness of another night, to be greeted with gladness by those whom we love, to look forth upon the fresh beauty of the sky and the light, to feel the thrill of life renewed from without and within—this is to hear the voice of the morning. Whence does it come but from the Source of nature without and of the answering soul within? For the morning is not self-moved or self-made. It is a beautiful thought and uttered word of God. He it is that commands, as in the beginning, Let there be light. It is His sun that rises rejoicing in strength for the splendid duty of the day. It is the glory of His presence that fills the earth, as a cup ready to overflow with trembling joy. Somewhere the day is always dawning, and everywhere it is a true dayspring from on high, its voice a message, its greeting a peace-greeting from the God of nature and of the soul.

The psalmist's heart was desolate. We do not know who or what was the enemy that had smitten his life down to the ground; but we do know whither he turned for relief. He stretched forth his hands unto God, thirsting for Him as a weary land for the rain of heaven. It was his prayer that with the passing of the night his grievous trial might also somehow pass away, and the voice of his Deliverer be heard in loving kindness again. "In the morning"—for the morning itself is a deliverance,—God's strong and gentle angel of resurrection. Its words unto the ends of the earth, with no articulate speech or language, are words of quickening power.

Cause me, Lord, to hear that Divine speech in the wakening day. Waken my heart to listen to that voice which comes not from the round world or the over-arching sky, from winds or waters, from opening blossoms or blithesome birds, from sunset splendours or the dewy East and the tranquil glories of the morning—that is not *of* them though *in* them all. Cause me to hear Thine own voice in loving kindness, saying, Behold, I make all things new. So may I live this day as those who are alive from the dead.

"For in Thee do I trust."

THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"So I prayed to the God of heaven."—*Neh. ii.* 4.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-6.

ONLY in this book of Nehemiah is God spoken of or addressed in prayer as "the God of heaven." And the name might seem at first thought simply to enthrone Him on high. For is not heaven far, far above us? There are the blessed spirits, clothed with holiness, worshipping in glory.

"There loyal hearts and true
Stand ever in the light,
All rapture through and through
In God's most holy sight."

But what comfort or encouragement is there for us who are of the earth, whose habitation is in the dust, to pray to the God of heaven? Much comfort and encouragement. For we have but to look up and see that the material heavens are high above the earth, and yet have it all the while in their closest keeping. They hold it fast in its awful orbit; they gather the clouds and send them down in fruitful showers; they pour forth the sunshine without which the earth would be

a kingdom of night and death. The material heavens are ours as truly as the sweet, quickening air in our lungs, or the solid ground beneath our feet: they compass us about, nourishing our life moment by moment. What is farther away than the sun? What is closer at hand than the sunshine? And the highest meaning of it all is that of a symbol of the Divine love and care. As the material heavens are near our bodies, so heaven itself is near our spirits. Therefore the God of heaven, in His infinite majesty and goodness, is also and equally our God, and is not far from every one of us.

I know that the very heaven of heavens is the dwelling-place of the Holy One. But listen, my soul, for it is His own voice that speaks: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite." O God of heaven, Thou art very near. Thou art the light on our path, the life that sustains our life, the heaven that ever broods above us with warmth and refuge in the shadow of its wings.

HOW CAN I THINK UPON GOD?

"When I remember Thee upon my bed,
And meditate on Thee in the night-watches.
—*Psa. lxiii.* 6.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

"AH, tell me not of meditation upon God," the fainting heart is ready to exclaim. "I cannot attain unto it; and if possible, what would it avail? Who by searching can find out the Eternal and Almighty?" But neither is there any other subject into which the meditative mind can penetrate more than a very little way. Nevertheless we may gather an ever-increasing store of knowledge about many things; and if we will, in it all may be gaining knowledge of Him without whom is nothing. "I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on Thy doings" —which is to meditate on the Divine Doer Himself. To look out upon the wondrous things of nature, or back upon the thrilling events of human history, or within, awestruck, upon the abysm of personal being, in a reverent spirit, with an uplifted listening heart, is to come into the sanctuaries of God and learn of Him. I like the thrice-told legend of the great Augustine,

meditating by the seaside on the mystery of the Holy Trinity. A child was carrying water to fill a little cavity which he had scooped out in the sand. "What is the object of thy task?" asked the learned saint. "To empty into this cavity all the waters of the ocean." "Impossible." "Not more impossible," replied the child, "than for thee, O Augustine, to explain the mystery on which thou art meditating." True enough; yet the child might fill his sand-cup with water, and the man might fill his mind with the knowledge of God.

But what is this other voice from the Psalms?

> "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee;
> And I am afraid of Thy judgments."

How can the sinful draw near to think upon the name of the Holy One? It is only through reconciling love. "So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too?" And such He hath shown Himself to be, indeed. Such, in the very glory of righteousness and love, we find Him in Jesus Christ His Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the remission of sins according to the riches of His grace. Let me find Thee, O God, in Jesus. Then verily shall my meditation of Thee be sweet, and "my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips."

THE OTHER SIDE OF PRAYER

"And Jehovah said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it."—*Exodus xiv.* 15, 16.

Contextual reading, vv. 13-25.

WAS it useless then for the great elect leader to cry unto Jehovah? Not at all. But it was also necessary that he should speak unto Israel, and that he should lift up his own hand and stretch out the rod that had been given him to deliver the people withal from their degrading bondage. It has been said that "on the night when Moses led Israel out of Egypt, history was born." That was indeed a momentous beginning. Yet the truth which this great world-event here illustrates is equally a truth of the humblest and most private life—namely, that the other side of prayer is obedience.

For prayer is no justifier of indolence. It is not an easy way of getting all one wishes, without cost of labour. It is no amulet to be worn, or charm to be chanted. Prayer is communion

of the heart and co-operation of the will with the infinite and ever-present God.

Suppose then I pray, "Bring me not into temptation," and forthwith put myself needlessly in the path of temptation; or pray "Teach me Thy truth," and am careless about doing the truth I know; or pray for others, and do not with self-denial serve them; or ask deliverance out of some great sorrow and peril, and fail to stretch forth the rod of deliverance which God has placed in my own hand: such prayer is dead, being alone. It may come from the fulness of sentimental desire; it does not come from the fulness of the true-hearted will. Let me unlock my granary, or cease to say prayers for the poor. Let me contribute liberally to ministerial support, or join no longer in the petition that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into His harvest.

> "And oft, perverser yet, we wrest
> The tenor of the prayer divine,
> And urgent cry, 'My will, not Thine,'
> In most presumptuous request."

Shall I ask, O Lord of life, that Thou shouldst do what I say, when meanwhile I am refusing to do what Thou dost say? Praying that Thy kingdom may come, let me go forth and be doing Thy will.

A PRAYER OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."—*Mat. vi.* 13.

Contextual reading, vv. 5-15.

Even Jesus was "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." And it is certain that God permits, at least, His children to be tempted. Under His government and providence, they are assailed by sundry evil suggestions. It is no less certain that God's children are tempted in the sense of being tried. Suffering is appointed—pain of body, loss of goods, mental perplexity, wounded affections—such as will test their faith and endurance.

What then is the purport of this petition which Jesus has taught us to offer? It is the language of the realised seriousness of a holy life, of its exposures and conflicts, and of the consequent need of Divine leadership and protection. There is said to be no more serious mistake in war than to underestimate the strength of the enemy. Jesus' disciples made this mistake at the beginning of their Christian warfare. "Even if I must die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee"—

so said self-confident Simon Peter, and "likewise also said all the disciples." But Jesus warned Simon Peter and them all, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." So here, in the prayer which He gave His disciples, Jesus would have them ask that the heavenly Father will spare them all possible temptation, while at the same time they pray, "Thy will be done," and trust Him in the midst of such temptation as, according to His will, cannot be kept away, to deliver them "from the evil one."

When Norman Macleod's wife lay in the delirium of fever, and all hope of recovery was vanishing, that night, as he wrote it down in his diary, witnessed "one of those awful soul struggles which seem to compress the history of years into minutes"; and this was his prayer: "My Father, I lie at Thy feet and desire to be led as a child, and to follow Jesus—to die with Him. Yet lead me not into deeper trial, lest I perish. Yet, Amen—Amen—I trust Thee." Is not this what Jesus meant?

THE REACTION OF LOVE

"There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more."—*Prov. xi.* 24.

Contextual reading, vv. 25-31.

It is a homely Scotch proverb, no apples are so good as those that have been divided. Truly in the mathematics of the kingdom of heaven, a half may be more than the whole. He who shares his life with another to-day will thereby have a larger life to share to-morrow—more for others, more for himself. It is simply an instance, the supreme instance, of the universal law of development through activity. As the musician's fingers become deft and nimble through the reactive effect of finding and touching the right keys at the right time, or the thinker's mind is strengthened by each new problem that he masters, so the love of God in the heart, which is spiritual life, is increased by every exertion and expression of it in service.

Therefore no Christian endeavour is in vain. Even though, in any particular case, it should fail to produce the direct intended effect, it cannot, simply *cannot,* fail to return and bless the

doer. For love, no less truly than muscle or mind, grows through exercise.

Shall the Christian then be ever saying within himself, "In this service to others I am also serving myself—filling my own granary with the grain I scatter"? Ordinarily, no more than the child at play is, or should be, thinking of the good health and increase of strength he is gaining by the doing of what he likes for its own sake. If my love to Thee be pure and true, I will do Thy will, Thou Master of my soul, whether any benefit accrue to myself or not. For what can be better, for its own sake, than the doing of Thy will? I would fain help and serve my fellows, hoping for nothing again.

> "Not for the sake of gaining aught,
> Not seeking a reward,
> But as Thyself hast lovèd me,
> O ever-loving Lord."

Yet I thank Thee for the gain. I bless Thee for whatever of reward, for whatever of good, through this or any other channel, under Thy gracious law and providence, flows into my life. I need it all. Thou art the giver of it all. Through the continual use of it all, may Thy kingdom be advanced.

LISTENING AND OBEDIENT

"What shall I do, Lord?"—*Acts xxii.* 10.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-21.

THE world's great leaders are often classified as men of thought and men of action. The name of the Apostle of the Gentiles must appear in both these classes. But even more notable in him was the spiritual characteristic of a listening obedient heart. As the answer of the child Samuel in the temple, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," was typical of his life throughout—a life ever open heavenward to hear the Divine speech, and equally ready with unfaltering fidelity to do it—so with this first recorded prayer of Paul. Heretofore he has lived before God in all good conscience, and recently as a strenuous opponent of the Church of Jesus, "persecuted this Way unto the death," but with his face toward the rising and not the setting sun: now when the Voice from heaven speaks, the answer is ready, "What shall I do, Lord?"—and from this time on, whether in retirement in Arabia or facing the mob in Jerusalem, whether weaving tent-cloth or standing in the midst of the Areopagus, the attitude of his mind, the

plan of his life, is absolutely simple. It is to hear the voice of God and obey. He was a man of reading and meditation, of prayer and study, of visions and revelations from the Lord. He would thrust aside every obstruction and have nothing come between him and the unfolding mystery of redeeming love. Yes, but it is equally true that he laboured unceasingly, untiringly, most abundantly, to put the truth that he received into act and achievement. "And when he had seen the vision [of the man of Macedonia] straightway we sought to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel unto them." What he knew, though it were only "in part," forthwith in equal measure he prophesied. Whatever he was commanded, in any heavenly vision, he did it.

It was this that made the young Pharisee of Tarsus and Jerusalem the chief Apostle of Christ and teacher of the Church through the ages and generations. It will put any man in the way of becoming all that he ought to be or can be. The men of vision and fidelity, the men of faith, are those who are mightily building the City of God on earth. For in them is the way of the Spirit. Through them, the listening and obedient, shines the light and speaks the voice and thrills the power of God Omnipotent.

ALONE BEFORE GOD

"This same king Ahaz."—*II Chron. xxviii.* 22.

Contextual reading, vv. 16-27.

NOTHING is so much a man's own as his character. It is the man himself unconsciously expressed in moral choice and habit. What am I? Ahaz' likeness is here, on this leaf of holy Scripture—where is mine? In the minds of fellowmen among whom I am living from day to day? Doubtless; but perfectly known to the mind of God only. As each of us actually is, in his innermost selfhood, so is he seen of God.

To the ordinary observer a great company of people is simply a multitude, a crowd, a mass: he thinks of them and deals with them collectively. But if he have a personal acquaintance or a close friend in the company, it is very differently that he thinks of him. The friend stands out distinctly before the face of his friend, with his own peculiarities, his own spirit, his own interests, his own life—not an indistinguishable portion of a mass, but a person. And how much more does God, the heavenly Father, know all men as individuals. Millions by millions multi-

plied connot confuse His thought, or lessen even to an infinitesimal degree His perfect knowledge of each. So therefore each one of us shall give account of himself to God. There are thoughts and heart-histories that are breathed into no human ear. But God has heard them all. There are hidden things of motive that have never been brought forth into the clear light of one's own consciousness. But no veil intervenes between either the least or the greatest of them and the eye of God.

How can I stand before the All-knowing and the All-holy? Create in me a clean heart, O God. What time I am afraid, I will flee unto Thee. I plead Thine atoning love and sacrifice in Jesus Christ. Look Thou upon my need; for that is my prayer. Trembling, I rejoice; for that love of Thine, no less than Thine infinite knowledge, particularises; and it may be mine; it *is* mine. "Who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*."

THE CALL FOR IMMORTALITY

"Oh, remember how short my time is:
For what vanity hast Thou created all the children of men!" —*Psa. lxxxix.* 47.

Contextual reading, vv. 44-52.

YES, it is indeed for vanity, on the supposition that this life is all. It is not merely a dream, but a discord and dire self-contradiction. We can see good reason why a tree should have been created, though only for a hundred years; or the plants of the garden for a single summer; or the grass of the field which blooms to-day and withers to-morrow; or a winged wonder of the insect world for an afternoon. These all live the life and run the course for which the endowments of their nature fit them. But man is enormously over-endowed for a mere temporary and earthly life. He is allied in his nature with the Eternal, akin to the Divine. From childhood he hears the voices of eternity in his soul. He knows what God is by knowing what he himself is required to be. He recognises a law of life that has nothing to do with time or matter or sense—the infinite law of Duty, the divine law of Love. Shall

all this go for nothing? Shall we be endowed for a higher sphere, but intended for only a few years' existence in a world of flesh and blood? Shall we be commanded to live as immortals, and then brought down to death, as mere creatures of time? Shall we be condemned in conscience for acting as a beast or a butterfly, and in the same breath told that essentially we are no better than they? Shall we walk with God, called into conscious and holy fellowship with the God of the living, and yet doomed the while to a speedy extinction of being?

The answer of the New Testament is in Him who has the words of eternal life. In His words, and in Himself. See the Christ living the heavenly life on earth. See His oneness with the Father. See the signs that He has wrought, face to face with disease and death to destroy them. See Him alive from the dead, in personal power and glory. Hear His own word: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he that eateth me [the Bread of God] he also shall live because of me." My soul, here is thy problem solved, here is thy quest satisfied, even in the Living One, who is the Fulfiller of the laws and prophecies both of the ancient inspired Scriptures and the more ancient human heart—who is thy Brother and thy Lord.

THE SONG OF THE LAW

"Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage."
—*Psa. cxix.* 54.

Contextual reading, vv. 49-56.

At first thought, law might seem a strange subject for song. Let the law of the land be acknowledged, upheld, obeyed. But it has never been a chosen theme of lyric poetry. "Sweet land of *liberty,* of *thee* I sing." But shall its statute-books or even its constitution kindle the heart into song? Indeed, why not? It is at least a supposable case. Suppose an openminded, true-hearted patriot, with a great country and a good government to live for. Its laws are righteous and peace-giving, a source of its prosperity, a guarantee of its freedom, a guardian of its glory. May he not rejoice in them? Shall he not have them written in his heart, as well as codified in books upon which he may lay his hand?

How much more, then, might the Psalmists of Israel love the law of Jehovah and make it their joy and song. It was Israel's distinction among

the peoples of the world, the source of her happiness, the ground for expectation of a more glorious future. It was not a series of abstract principles, and much less a collection of arbitrary commands, but the moral law, the law of the spirit—a book of life for the nation, the home, the individual soul. It was the supreme expression of Jehovah's own holy and loving will; and therefore to sing the praises of the law was to sing the praises of Jehovah Himself.

May I never be satisfied, Thou God of truth, so long as Thy law is simply written in the Scriptures and not also in my heart. How can I love truth, which is to love Thee, and find Thy will unlovely or obedience an irksome and heartless task? Love feels no load, Love sings at its work. Have compassion, I beseech Thee, upon my infirmities, and save me from the dominance of self, which is the misery of the soul. O that a clearer vision of Thy will, which is the expression of Thine own nature, the joy of heaven, the hope of earth, may attune my everyday life into a song.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE

"Behold, even the moon hath no brightness,
And the stars are not pure in His sight:
How much less man, that is a worm!
And the son of man, that is a worm!"

—*Job xxv.* 5, 6.

Contextual reading, the Chapter.

A FRIEND with whom I was walking in his garden handed me the fragment of a leaf, on which a cabbage worm was hiding himself away in a little greenish case of his own manufacture. A dull, repulsive worm, he had crawled and eaten till satisfied; and had then retired into this tiny house of life-in-death. I put it upon the window-sill in my room. In a few days there sat beside the broken case an exquisite butterfly, with great luminous wings, which, while I was looking, floated away on the summer air, and alighted upon a full-blown rose in a neighbour's yard. So much for the capacity of transformation, the miracle of predestined attainment. From a root of ugliness to a blossom of beauty, from crawling to flight, from the thraldom of the cabbage leaf to the freedom of the realm of air!

The mind is oppressed with a sense of painful disheartenment at the thought of the insignificance of man. Petty, homely, grovelling, sinful—"man that is a worm." If even the stainless glory of the stars is unclean before the Infinite Purity, how much more this writhing lump of flesh.

But let me pause a moment. Perhaps there is a deeper truth to be learned. This at least is true: I can feel the pain, the disheartenment, the apparent unfitness and contradiction, and that itself betokens the possibility of a higher development. Pain is a sign of life: the dead do not feel. Let the ancient seer call me a worm, then, if he will. I will not reject his witness. But the very sense of humiliation which it gives is a prophetic pain. It tells of a nature whose home is not in the dust, of a life that may be lived above the stars. The man whom I meet, the man that I am, is potentially a son of God reigning in the light and glory of his Father's kingdom. "Man that is a worm"—"Beloved, now are we children of God . . . we know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is." "Man that is a worm"—"These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they?"

THE POWER OF LIFE

"Alienated from the life of God."—*Eph. iv.* 18.

Contextual reading, vv. 17-24.

HERE lies a block of the finest marble, and half covered with dust by its side, a small brown seed apparently quite too insignificant for notice. But in fact the seed is, beyond comparison, the more interesting and significant of the two. Substitute a diamond, such in size and beauty as never was, for the marble; and the same is true. The marble, the diamond, though a very house of the light, though practically imperishable, is cold, fixed, changeless. Let a thousand years pass; it will be nothing more, can do nothing more, than at this moment. But the seed can grow. Grant that this is the only quality worth mentioning that it possesses; this of itself is enough to class it with the mightiest and most beneficent forces on earth. See it lifting its head far above the lifeless stone at its side, a fruit-bearing tree that may reproduce itself ten thousand fold, the world over. And one word expresses it all—the seed is *alive.*

The life of God in the soul of man—what is

its possible and intended outcome? Increase of knowledge, righteousness, energy, influence, even unto eternity. The limit is not imaginable. Because of his wonderful birth, the people asked concerning the child John the son of Zacharias, "What then shall the child be?" But more wonderful and more significant is the birth from above of any soul. Because it is a communication of the Divine life, whose possibilities of growth and fruitage only the eye of Omniscience can measure.

What manner of man may I be? If not alienated from the life of God, what is it possible for me to become? O Thou who art the God not of the dead, but of the living, I rest in Thy Almighty love. I am weak and ignorant, I cannot bear the vision of an infinite possibility. But do Thou lead me on.

"I do not ask to see
The distant scene: one step enough for me."

Not as an alien, but as a child in my Father's house, teachable, trustful, faithful, let me grow in wisdom and in grace; and the boundless Future—it is in Thy holy keeping.

THE INNERMOST VOICE OF GOD

"These, not having the law, are the law unto themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith." —*Rom. ii.* 14, 15.

Contextual reading, vv. 11-16.

It is the conscience, not of the Christian, nor of the son of Abraham, nor of an Immanuel Kant overwhelmed with awe at the contemplation of "the moral law within," of which the Apostle to the Gentiles is speaking; but the conscience of the Gentile, the pagan. It is possible, he says, for those who have not the law of God as the Church under either the Old or the New Covenant has received it, to hear a witness within testifying to righteousness and iniquity, and to show in spirit and conduct the works of the law done from the heart.

There is a voice of God, then, that may be heeded or unheeded, obeyed or disobeyed, in every human soul. Even among peoples to whom Sinai is unknown, this voice is heard, and has been heard from the beginning of the world. For it is no other than God Himself that speaks in the intuitions and authority of conscience. *Thou*

shalt do right has all the sanctity, because all the reality, of an immediate Divine command. Listen, O soul of man, to the inner word which declares that reverence and truth and honesty and love are right, and that profanity and falsehood and fraud and hatred are wrong, and at the same time, bidding thee avoid the wrong and do the right, approves or condemns thine act; and thou art listening to the very voice of the God after whose likeness thine own moral nature was created.

But the witness of conscience may be so disregarded as to grow fainter and fainter on the ear, or practically cease to be heard. In pagan lands? Let me not be thinking of them now, nor of this enlightened Christian land, but of my own personal life. Save me, Thou God of truth, from paltering with conscience. May I not substitute for it the opinions and practices of friends, even the most cultured or gifted or attractive. May I not yield to the profane tyranny of "What other people say and do"—thus turning my ears away from Thine own voice within. May not the will of the flesh, nor the vagaries of an unchastened imagination, nor the customs of society, but Thy will, my Father, be the law of my life. In little things, if such there be, as in great, may I hear Thee and obey.

GRATITUDE AS REWARD

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom."—*Luke vi.* 38.

Contextual reading, vv. 27-38.

"THEY shall give." Who shall thus give in return for what has been given? I take it to mean, first of all, one's fellow-men. As a man speaks, so will he be spoken to; as he treats others, so will he be treated by them; as he gives, so will the receiver give back. And not in some thin, ghostly manner, as a graphophone, or as "Echo answering in her sleep from hollow fields," but genuinely, generously, good and overflowing measure. True, the law is not here universal. Like every other rule of free personal conduct, it has numerous exceptions. Nevertheless it is a real law of human life—the principle of responsiveness to the touch of a fellow-man—observance of which will be followed by its proper reward.

What "shall they give"? For one thing, gratitude. I have been tempted to complain, this is an ungrateful world; the proverb seems true,

"Eaten bread is soon forgotten." But let me stop and ask of the man within my own breast. Am I an ungrateful wretch, treating one who has made sacrifice to befriend me, with unkindness or indifference? If not, my complaint is hushed, unless, indeed, I be a Pharisee, proclaiming, "I am not as other men are."

Sweet and satisfying is human gratitude. Let me rather receive the grateful love of the poor and unhappy, who have nothing else to give, than all the gifts or plaudits of the favoured sons of earth. Here is a grave beside which stands the stately memorial marble, and that is all. Here is another, to which has found his way a humble child of poverty or sorrow, who says amid the tears that rise unbidden from the heart, "He was my friend." O God, let this poor dust of mine lie some day in such a grave. I want the love of my neighbour. I want Thy love mediated to me through his kind and grateful remembrance. Let me then freely give my life to him in Thy name.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content."—*Phil. iv.* 11.

Contextual reading, vv. 10-20.

THERE is a touch of pathos in the story of the philosopher, dying in old age, who turned his head to listen to an intelligent conversation, with the remark, "I should be happy to die learning something." As long as one lives, let him learn. But the highest knowledge is such as cannot be gathered from any conversation, or any book, or in any laboratory. It is entirely consistent with literary or historical or scientific pursuits, but equally independent of them. The schools neither teach it nor shut it out. "Learn to *do well.*" It is a knowledge through the education of the spirit, not of the intellect.

An example is given in this letter of a prisoner of Jesus Christ. "I have learned"—the secret of Christian contentment. Accordingly, to the courteous acknowledgment of their kind gifts which Paul writes to his friends in Philippi, we see him add that, even lacking these, he should not have been unhappy or dissatisfied. He could

both thankfully possess and cheerfully do without.

"I have learned"—where? The answer is unequivocal. It was not by being with the stoics, determined upon self-mastery, that this independence of outward things was attained; but in the school of Christ—by being with Him. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me."

"I have learned"—how? Not in the way of dreaming, nor of permitting sacred formulas to float through the brain. It was in the way of discipline. To know Christ thus involved a fellowship in Christ's sufferings. It meant Lystra with its stoning, and Ephesus with its wild beasts, and Rome with its prison, as well as friends, and freedom, and abundance. For how can a man learn to be content in every state, with no experience of want and pain? But the cost was unworthy of comparison with the excellency of the knowledge that came through this Divine discipline of life.

Art thou willing, my soul, to be educated by thy Master? Wilt thou really follow Him? It may be sometimes through the path of pain, but it will always be into the path of peace.

THANKFUL—FOR WHAT?

" In everything give thanks."—*I Thess. v.* 18.

Contextual reading, vv. 14-24.

BECAUSE in everything is the presence and the providence of God. Here is the all-sufficing truth. Is it *to* Him that in everything we are to be thankful? It is also *for* Him. Sometimes, I fear, men think of God as only entering their lives at certain chief turning-points or crises. A severe illness bears us down into the very shadows of death, but we are raised up and, behold, the old familiar world around us is a new, bright world; a threatened bereavement oppresses the heart nigh unto breaking, but the stroke is withheld, and the dear light of our home shines on. Then is the soul brought consciously near to the great realities. We had almost looked upon the Unseen. So we kneel down in solemn gladness before God and acknowledge His hand of delivering mercy in our lives.

But is He not the unceasing Caretaker? By whose hand am I fed in body and in spirit, or guided in the way wherein I ought to walk, or defended from numberless perils, this very pass-

ing moment? I have read of Chrysostom, him of the Golden Mouth, in exile for conscience' sake in a far wild country, dying from hardship and exposure, with the doxology on his lips, "God be praised for everything." I have seen a strong-bodied and manly countryman standing at a well and thanking God for the gift of cold water. "All things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ": therefore in all things it is fitting to give thanks.

But suppose the stroke of bereavement should fall, and the light of my home go out in darkness: shall it then be a time of murmuring or still a time of trustfulness and praise? Suppose I am brought down into the shadows of death, and am not raised up, but the shadows deepen into darkness: shall there be no doxology on my lips for the love that has followed me all my days and will not let go in death? In death? In that wisely-sent darkness that shrouds from mortal eyes the gates of day.

THE GOD OF THE IMPERFECT

"For she said within herself, If I do but touch His garment, I shall be made whole."—*Matt. ix.* 21.

Contextual reading, vv. 18-22.

THE woman's unspoken prayer was genuine. She had made her way to Jesus and put forth such faith in Him as she could. But it was an unenlightened faith. To trust to the touching of the Lord's garments, as if healing virtue were in the mere physical contact—that was a crude superstition. Yet it was not in vain. For Jesus answered the cry of the heart, even thus mistakenly expressed—not, as we know full well, because of its superstitious element, but in spite thereof. "Daughter, be of good cheer, thy faith hath made thee whole." The heart of the Saviour was touched no less really than the fringe of his robe; and out of that answering infinite love the power went forth to heal.

Let me know the truth. I would fain be free from all superstition and from all hurtful error. Unwillingly would I rest in any ignorance or false view as to the way of access to God and communion with Him. Error, whether culpa-

ble or innocent, is limitation, a fetter upon the soul. "The truth shall make you free." Break Thou my chains, O God of truth. Yet I do thank Thee that Thou dost not wait in the putting forth of Thy power to save, till the believing heart is in all things doctrinally sound or ethically enlightened. If such were Thy will, who could ever hope that his prayer would be heard? Thou art the God of the imperfect. Thou lookest at the heart—at the need, the inward striving, the aspiration, the budding affection, the aim. Many are the mistakes and ignorances of Thy children, and great are the losses thereby incurred; nevertheless Thy word of grace and truth remains, "According to"—not thy past life or thy knowledge—"according to thy faith, be it unto thee." According to the openness of our hearts toward Thee, wilt Thou look upon us in the forgiveness of iniquities and the healing of all diseases. Do Thou with Thy quickening touch make us alive to Thee. Do Thou purify and enlarge our faith. Do Thou speak some word of peace.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDHOOD

"See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."—*Matt. xviii.* 10.

Contextual reading, vv. 12-14.

Not in this world can we do more than just begin to know and appreciate what a little child is worth. Only in the light of heaven does its immortal greatness appear. It is honoured and cared for there. The children's angels are among the angels of the Presence, who stand before the face of the heavenly Father. To be entrusted with ministration to the little ones of earth, to come forth and guard them from physical dangers, to keep them from the power of temptation, to shed some ray of light upon the dawning moral consciousness, to be their unseen care-takers even as friends in flesh and blood are always about them? Lord of angels and of men, Thou knowest what is their ministry. If it were well that we should know it, Thou wouldst have told us.

But this would I learn with ever-deepening

insight—the significance of childhood, the possibilities of life's morning, the value of a soul. I would learn it from personal consciousness, from facts of observation, from the teaching of Jesus. I would learn it from the Babe of Bethlehem. Let me not despise the form in which the Lord of glory entered the life of humanity. Let me not think it possible to care too wisely or lovingly for those who, here in the home, in the Sunday school, on the street, are at the momentous outset of an endless career. When the tender and inimitable grace, the trustful wonderment, the sweetly broken accents of thought and speech, when these pass—what will develop? And in the long years to come—what will follow? Shall the "walls of the prison-house close round," or the heavenly vision shine on ever brighter with its ensphering light? And beyond the veil—? To think of that, and to guide a little child safely in the path of life is a work to fill the heart of the angels of the Father. Is it not infinitely worthy of any man's ministry?

WHO CAN HEAR IT?

"Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?"—*John vi.* 60.

Contextual reading, vv. 54-66.

It was only pleasant to follow Jesus as the people had recently been doing. It cost nothing. On the contrary, they had had their sick healed without the payment of physicians' fees, and their own hunger satisfied, at least on one occasion, with bread of Jesus' providing. On the green and sunny plain, or across the bright waves, or through the cheerful streets—to follow Jesus there, while he taught many things and did many merciful deeds, was no hardship. But when He began to show them that this was not to be His disciples indeed, they were displeased. When He declared that He Himself, and not His material gifts, was the Bread of God, which must be received into the conscience and heart, they stumbled at such teaching, and with the murmur on their lips, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?"—went away.

But what am I, coldly to condemn these men

of old? Rather let me be careful not myself to pick and choose among the teachings or the precepts of the Master. What is the saying that is hard for me to hear? That I must love my neighbour as myself? that I must even love my enemy? that I must be satisfied with no lower ideal than to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect? that I must cut off the right arm and pluck out the right eye to escape the fire of hell? that for every idle word that men speak they shall give account in the day of judgment? that the forsaking of all that one hath is the path of discipleship? that my life must be a daily communion with the Highest? My merciful Master, let me not stumble at these sayings of thine. They are words of eternal life. Put the spirit of them into my heart. Make me to be "of the truth"; then shall Thy words not offend, but quicken, and whatsoever Thou shalt speak, I will "hear Thy voice." Let me learn better and better the meaning of Thy words, not in the letter, but in the spirit. Then let me press upward to their heavenly height, and not try complainingly to win them down to my own poor plane of vision and deed.

A LITTLE WHILE AND FOREVER

"A little while, and ye behold me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me."—*John xvi.* 16.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and forever."—*Heb. xiii.* 8.

Contextual reading, John xvi. 17-22.

LIFE is largely made up of meetings and partings. Of its most brilliant joys, and thank God, of its sorrows, and disappointments, and bitter anguish, the word is, This also is but for a little while. No two days are alike: no departed day ever returns. A company of friends spend the evening pleasantly together; and at its close, as they separate to go their several ways, someone asks, "When shall we all have just such an evening together again?" Never, it will never be. Such repetition is not in the line of God's ordering of the world. Variety, transiency, change, development, the new displacing the old —that is the Divine plan of human life.

Even the incarnate Son of God could remain on earth only for a little while. No wonder the disciples did not understand it. That *He* should be taken away from them seemed impossible.

It would be a work of violence; it would contradict all that they had felt or seen of the fitness of things. Surely that could not be the will of God. "What is this that He saith unto us?"

I bless thee, O Christ, for the light that has fallen upon this word of thine. Thou art leading us on from the transient to the eternal. It was only a little while that the disciples saw Thee in the flesh; it was only a little while that their eyes were darkened by the Cross so that they could hardly see Thee at all. But then Thou didst come again and abide. It is now no longer "a little while" with Thee and those whom Thou callest friends. It is forever. Thou dost bring eternity into time. Closer to Thee, closer to Thee—this is Thy life-plan for those who love Thee, as the fleeting years go by. The most real treasures of life do not pass away. It is the outward that is temporary; the unseen, the essential, abides; and Thou, O Christ, art the ever-present and eternal Friend.

Nor is this all. The transient also is our very own. It enters into our character, it works for our good, it will meet us in higher forms hereafter. Whatever we do or suffer or enjoy in Thy name, Thou everlasting Christ, it makes for the abiding wealth of the soul.

THE ASSURANCE OF SONSHIP

"The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."—*Rom. viii.* 16.

Contextual reading, vv. 12-17.

SURELY it is of the deep things of God and the human soul that such words are spoken. To know one's self to be a child of God! For this sonship is here declared as an experience as well as a fact. It is said to be testified to within—by God's Spirit and our own together.

What then is the experience of sonship to God? Let us reverently try to trace it back to its beginnings, in a clearly-marked instance. Here is a man who lives in habitual sin and unbelief. How does he think of God? Simply as the Almighty, the Creator, the Great Master. He does not know the filial feeling toward his Maker. But when in Christ such a man is forgiven and saved from sin and unbelief, he does begin to know this feeling. There is a sense of nearness to God, of trust, of reverent love, of converse; and when Jesus bids him in praying say, "Our Father," the name seems not unfitting upon his lips. He has a filial feeling now, a sense of son-

ship to God. Is not this the testimony of his own spirit that he is a child of God? But whence came it? who awakened it in his spirit? It is not of his own origination. It was awakened, it was inspired, by the Spirit of God. That Spirit within enables him to say "Our Father"; and so the testimony is that of God's Spirit together with his own. It is that of God's Spirit *in* his own.

We dare believe it. Yet, let me confess, there was a time when I was greatly troubled touching this assurance of sonship. I wanted to enjoy it in an unmistakable form which I myself had chosen—to have it mathematically demonstrated, or to be caught up into a third heaven of illumination, so that with a certitude that admitted of no degrees, but was simply absolute, I could say, "I know myself to be a child of God." Such an ecstasy was never given in answer to my prayer. I thank Thee, Spirit of Christ, for Thine own better teaching. Create in me the filial feeling of love and trust toward the Father in heaven. It will deepen with all faithfulness in doing the heavenly Father's will; and it will be Thy voice in the voice of my own spirit witnessing that I am God's child.

THE INEFFABLE NAME

"I made known unto them Thy name, and will make it known."—*John xvii.* 26.

Contextual reading, vv. 20-26.

We cannot doubt what that Name was. "Neither doth any know the *Father,* save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." Had the name never been made known before? No, not *made known.* It had been implied, or suggested, or uttered in broken accents by psalmists and prophets of old. But in Jesus the Son of God it found utterance, clear, full, perfect, beyond all prophetic thought or anticipation.

But here is another word—I "will make it known." On the eve of the crucifixion, then, the revelation was not yet completed. The heavenly Father was to be better known than even the most enlightened of the Twelve had as yet known Him. And Jesus fulfilled His promise. Pentecost, with the Apostolic age which followed, was in fulfilment of it. When, through his glorification, the Spirit came in fulness of light and power, the name of God as Father was more ef-

fectually declared than in the words of Jesus himself before He went away. Indeed, the word is still, "I will make it known." The promise is in process of fulfilment through the Christian ages. Has there not been a marked fulfilment of it in our own age?

"I will make it known"—to each believing soul? Undoubtedly that Name is a personal and perpetual revelation to each one. The Christian child is taught to utter it from infancy; and if there be a true father and mother in the home, in them he will learn much of what the Father in heaven must be. Said one whose happiness it had been to be brought up in such a home: "Because my father's love reached out to very many, I knew that God loved me. Because my father's love reached out to very many, I knew that God loved the whole world." Then, if with the swift revolving years the fountain of fatherhood is unsealed in one's own heart, he will bow his knees "unto the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named," with a new and unexpected sense of what the divine fatherhood must mean. So, in all the ways of providence and grace, if he follow on to know, there will be interpreted to him the ineffable Name.

"And will make it known."

PRAYER AND SERVICE

"And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that with him followed after Him; and they found Him, and say unto Him, All are seeking Thee."—*Mark i.* 35-37.

Contextual reading, vv. 29-39.

It was no time, they thought, for one whose services as teacher and healer were in such demand, to be alone praying. So they broke in upon that holy solitude to call their Lord back to the eager people. They did not know the vital relation of prayer and service. They could not understand the closeness of this relation even in the life of the sinless Saviour. They failed to see that He was receiving in secret strength to be spent openly. But "Simon and they that were with him" were at this time only beginners in the Christian life. Afterward they learned many things through discipleship with Christ, and in the Interpreter's House, the sphere of the Spirit's discovering light. So also may we in our lifetime; and one of these great truths is the necessity of prayer to the fulness of spiritual

vision and of power to do the work of God. When our Lord says to the listening soul to-day, "He that would be my disciple, let him follow me," does He mean that the disciple shall follow Him in this or that other path but not in the path of prayer? Will honesty of intention, with reading of good books, a clean life, liberality in giving, saying prayers, activity in this or that line of church work, meet the requirement? One had better ask, Will not a child in the home do well enough to attend to his various duties, without caring to seek the presence of his father and mother, or to make claim upon their attention and their help, or to open his heart to them, or to come into contact with their spirit of wisdom, love, and parenthood?

The men of prayer are the men of power. The conversation, the act of kindness, the preaching, the life, that is imbued with a spirit that comes only from the inner chamber of Divine communion, will communicate the very power of God. Let me take time to clothe myself with strength for service. Let me not be so unwise and so unfilial toward my heavenly Father as to grudge the still hour of prayer.

IN THE WORLD

"And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to Thee."—*John xvii.* 11.

Contextual reading, the Chapter.

THEY were not to accompany their Lord through the gate of death, which was the entrance-way into His glory; nor to pitch their tents henceforth upon some mount of transfiguration; nor to flee into the wilderness or shut themselves up at home in a cloistered piety. "These are *in the world*"—among their fellows, where Jesus had lived, at whose hands and for whose sake he was now about to die. They needed the world. It was their suitable test and discipline. It was the school in which they were to be educated in the Christian life for their entrance into glory. And they were needed by the world. They must be Jesus' representatives. Even greater works than His should they do, by the power of the Spirit, as witnesses of His cross and resurrection. Day by day they were to shine as lights among men, "holding forth the word of life."

So then it is the Christian's calling to live the

life of a man in the midst of his fellow-men. One does not become less human, but more, in becoming a disciple of the Son of Man. One's dutifulness as a son, kindness as a father, fidelity as a husband, patriotism as a citizen, is purified and intensified by all that he receives of the mind of Christ. To make this world, like heaven, a kingdom of God—that is what the Church, and every individual Christian, is for.

But very real is the danger of worldliness. My Father, if I love the world, the love of Thee is not in me. The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the vainglory of life—these are not of Thee, they come from beneath. Mercifully save me from their insidious presence. Save me from their subtle influence. Save me from their corrupting power. I do not have to be rich or prominent or applauded, in order to be worldly. In the hut as truly as in the mansion, one may kneel at the shrine of the god of this world. But it must be that in the mansion is the more powerful temptation, the closer besetting sin. With what difficulty shall they that have riches or prominence or applause, keep the unspotted garment. May I seek none of these things. May Thine approval, my Father, far, far outweigh them all.

THE POWER TO BEAR

"I know . . . thy patience."—*Rev. ii.* 19.

Contextual reading, James v. 7-11.

SHALL we call it one of the "minor" graces? That seems an unfitting, non-luminous word. Patience is self-control, tranquillity, endurance, steadfastness in suffering and in all life's long endeavour. The architect will not fail to test the strength of his materials, and thus to estimate the power of resistance to pressure, in the framework of his building. Otherwise his labour may be worse than in vain. Patience is the moral power of resistance to pressure, and the lack of it in character-building may be fatal. Nor does the eye of the Divine Architect fail to note and commend this strength of the soul. "I know thy patience."

God Himself has been named "the God of patience." Have we imagined that He has nothing to bear? Not such is the word of revelation. The God of the Scriptures is long-suffering. He bids all His children cast their burdens upon Him, the care-taking Burden-bearer. He is grieved with the hardness of their heart. Can

we think of the groaning and travailing creation, of universal and age-long human suffering, and above all, of the sins and wickedness of men, and have no thought of a burden on the heart of the God of love? "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto Thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?" I do not wonder that Henry Drummond, speaking of the life of young men in the cities he knew, broke down in anguish of spirit, and exclaimed, "How can God bear it?" Yet He does bear it, "slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness." And a thousand years are with Him as one day. He waits for the seed to grow, for the fruit to ripen, for the process of the ages to do its work, for the fulness of time to come.

Thou God of patience, do Thou give something of Thy power to wait and to bear. Let not my strength be weakness. Let not the house of my life, though built upon the true foundation, give way before the storm through lack of the energy of resistance. Be it far from me to worry, to speak pettishly, to give up. In my patience may I win my life, possess it, hold it, make it my very own. Yea, let me live it unto the end in "the kingdom and patience which are in Jesus."

THE FAILURE OF A LIFE

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh it away."—*John xv.* 2.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-8.

I HAVE seen a wreck by the seashore. A noble ship that once sat as a swan on the waters had struck a hidden rock or run aground, and been beaten to death by the waves. And there it lay on the beach, dismantled, broken, useless, a deserted and pitiable thing. It seemed a picture of a lost life.

But it is not the only picture. The wreck may fitly represent the loss of a life through vice or crime. But there are other forms of failure, other causes of spiritual death. Let us listen, though it be with a trembling heart, to this word of the Master: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh it away." To be in Christ and not live the Christ-life, to have a union with Him that is nominal only, to be numbered outwardly with His disciples and not show the fruits of His Spirit—that is to fail in life. One may turn away in self-respect from vice, and shrink in horror from crime, and yet not so share the mind of Christ as, in the true sense, to live.

The fruitless branch, as well as the shipwreck, is a picture of failure in life.

It is much that we should make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, and that we should refrain from trespassing upon the rights of our neighbour. But it is not enough. There are subtler forms of sin that are just as certainly destructive of the health of the soul—sins of covetousness, self-righteousness, formalism, fretfulness, unholy ambition. These may be indulged while outward respectability is maintained and outward success achieved. But to abide in Christ is to share in that spirit of truth, righteousness, patience, peace, goodness, love, which is in Him, and so to be saved from the sins of the spirit as well as from the grosser but not worse sins of the flesh. And yet more, it is to live among men, like Him, as one that serveth. Was He "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners"? Verily, even as God is undefiled. But He was also ceaselessly diligent in doing good. Christian goodness is positive, aggressive. To abide in Christ is to *do* the will of God.

"He taketh it away," "Apart from me"—this, and nothing else is the loss of a life. To abide in Christ—this, and nothing else, is to have "fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life."

THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE

"And he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the damsel; and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when His disciples heard thereof, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb."—*Mark vi.* 28, 29.

Contextual reading, vv. 14-29.

THAT which had such an ending did not look like a successful life. When we remember who this young man was, how he had lived, and then how and when he died, the first thought is that of incompleteness and failure. John was highly endowed and thoroughly trained for a great prophetic ministry. From infancy he had received the gifts and yielded to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His youth and early manhood, till the age of thirty years, had been spent in retirement. Away from the city and all the busy affairs of men, he had lived in secluded rural places. There, alone with the God of his fathers, he had spent the days and nights in meditation and prayer. At last the word of God comes to John in the wilderness. He goes forth to proclaim it, and his voice falls like thunder peals upon the

startled consciences of the people. But after a few months of activity, he is suddenly arrested, imprisoned, beheaded. Thirty years of preparation, six months of service—that surely looked like failure. It would seem as if the results accomplished were incommensurate with the expenditures made. And one can imagine the subtle Tempter whispering to John in prison: "They were all in vain, those dreams of a special and far-reaching mission; your life is ending, all unfinished and useless."

But there is another point of view and a higher, even as the kingdom of heaven is higher than the sense-world. John attained unto a strong and holy character—self-denying, courageous, humble, devoted to the will of God. Then, too, he fulfilled the mission on which he was sent—to prepare the way of the Christ. And at the last he glorified God by a martyr's death, and bequeathed the priceless legacy of a noble example to the Christian ages. I would that my life might be such a failure. Let its mere circumstances be what they may, and let its course be ever so short or restricted, to *come into harmony with the will of God,* that is a life's unspeakable success.

THE POWER TO HEAR

"As He said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—*Luke viii.* 8.

Contextual reading, vv. 4-7.

It was the Teacher's call for attention. Even to hear with the outward ear it is necessary to attend. Many voices are in the air, many words are spoken, that are not really heard, because not heeded. The man in the pew sits in respectful silence while the man in the pulpit is delivering the sermon, and fails to catch the articulate sounds, because his mind is otherwhere. "I did not hear," complains the child. "You did not listen," replies the teacher.

Much more is attention necessary to *understand* the truth.

> "*Apply* thy heart unto instruction,
> And thine ears to the word of knowledge."

To the drowsy and indifferent the Teacher of teachers Himself could impart no true knowledge.

"Let him hear"—let him attend, give heed, listen. But the word is "he that hath ears to

hear, let *him* hear." Does not this imply that only certain persons have the inner ear and consequently are able to hear? Does it not mean that Jesus knew that as to any others, it was impossible for them to understand His teachings? We cannot believe the meaning to be that there were those who were destitute of the inborn receptive capacity; but that there were those who had not so used and improved this capacity as to be capable of receiving Jesus' deep spiritual sayings.

I can see certain beauties in the great hymns of the Church, and can feel certain harmonies of sound when they are sung; but my friend can see and hear far more, because his mind and ear for sacred song are better cultivated and developed. So is it with hearing the words of Jesus, or indeed any other " word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Thou God of truth, one may listen indeed, and gain great riches, when, through attentiveness and obedience to the truth already made known, the understanding heart has been enlarged. But just as I am, and morning by morning, and day by day, I would hearken to Thy voice. For Thou speakest evermore in that sacredest of all sanctuaries, the inmost silence of the spirit, so that the willing ear can hear.

THE BEST OF 'ALL

" Because Thy loving kindness is better than life
My lips shall praise Thee."

—*Psa. lxiii.* 3.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

" I WOULD have run," said the child of a patriotic soldier describing the perils of a useless battle. " Ah, but there are some things, my son, dearer than life," was the father's reply. Duty is dearer, love is dearer. At the cost of these, no life is worth saving. At the cost of these, to live is to die.

Life, indeed, when stripped of any of its higher possessions and joys—knowledge, companionship, aspiration, service—sinks in the scale. It sinks toward the plane of mere existence; and a day of the human is better than a thousand of the animal.

But those elect spirits that climb to the topmost heights of blessedness, what is it that they obtain? Let us not be misled by a figure. The heights of blessedness are in the vale of humility. The elect spirits are those that are willing to receive as a free gift the incomparable treasure.

"Thy loving kindness"—that is the name by which the psalmist calls it in this inspired hymn of praise and longing. Here is the Supreme Good, which includes all. A great American preacher, standing on a river-boat, one inclement winter day, had his attention called by a friend to a sea-gull flying in the face of the wind. "Yes," was the reply, "he is mine." "Yours?" "Yes, I am fellow-heir," he said, following with his eyes the bird's brave contention, in a tearful joy. If I have my friend's love, I have my friend himself and whatever he can give. If I have the loving kindness of God, I have the highest expression of Himself, I have His friendship, I have His fatherhood; and if I am God's child, Himself and all that He has are mine. This world of Nature —yes, and this equally present world of spirits— is the inheritance of His children, who are fellow-heirs with their Elder Brother, in whom the Father is well pleased.

"So will I bless Thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in Thy name.
My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips."

THE DECISION OF DOUBT

"But he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin."—*Rom. xiv.* 23.

Contextual reading, vv. 14-22.

"I HAVE been greatly blessed," said Horace Bushnell, "in my doubting." Earnestly striving and patiently waiting for the truth, that deep Christian thinker came to see it more clearly and prize it more highly than would otherwise have been possible. His creed became his own, not another's, a most real and precious possession. May not a faithful soul be greatly blessed, likewise, in the mists of doubt that sometimes rest on moral questions? It may be that here, as in the case of doctrinal truth, our preference would be to have everything made perfectly plain, without the cost of any painful thought on our part. But nothing is more certain than that such is not the way of God toward His children in this world. Nor need we hesitate a moment to believe that God's way, with its moral questionings and difficult decisions, is best for the perfecting of the soul.

The Christians of apostolic days were not spared this discipline. Is it right for a Christian to eat certain food? was one of the embarrassing questions that arose among them. The Apostle, deciding the question in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, left them entirely free to do as they would in such a matter. Nevertheless he adds that if anyone's moral judgment is not clear as to the propriety of eating this food, he must refrain; because the doing of an act of whose rightness the doer is doubtful, when there is no doubt as to the rightness of refraining from it, is wrong, and will bring him into condemnation. For "whatsoever is not of faith"—not of belief, conviction, assurance that the Divine will does not prohibit the proposed deed—"is sin."

I would pray for power to refuse to do not only that which is unquestionably sinful, but also that of whose moral fitness there is any real doubt. Have I doubt as to the rightness of indulgence in this amusement, of reading this book, of putting myself under the influence of this narcotic, of following this employment, of selling these goods, of eating this food? Then for me the question is settled. The doubt itself has decided, and it forbids the deed.

"Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMPERFECT

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect."—*Phil. iii.* 12.

Contextual reading, vv. 7-21.

Irrational and unmoral life is satisfied. The snail travels as fast as he aspires to travel, and his little shell is house enough for him—so there is good reason to believe. The mockingbird does not forecast and labour that he may learn new music, but simply sings the song that spontaneously rises in his throat at the time. They have "obtained"; they have been "made perfect."

I have had no such experience. I seem to myself to have been occupied thus far about the beginnings of things only—to have hardly begun to be. In childhood I expected that I should have "obtained"—should have been full-fed with the true and beautiful and good, satisfied, "made perfect"—before reaching my present age. But it has not been so. More than ever, my "reach" is beyond my "grasp."

Thou God and Father of spirits, it is because Thou hast set eternity in my heart. Thou hast

touched my nature with a yearning sense of the immortal. Thou hast fixed no limit to my aspirations. Thou hast put at my command no plummet that can sound the depths of my need, no line with which to measure the possibilities of a soul. Great is the significance of the consciously imperfect. To be satisfied and cease to strive would be to lose that which has already been gained. I thank Thee, God of my life, both for that peace of Thine which steadies and strengthens the soul in its upward struggle, and for the vision of the unattained, which will not let it rest in any bower of ease.

It was the recent New Year testimony of an eminent Christian worker: "My motto for years has been, 'Dissatisfied always, discouraged never.' Dissatisfied, because he who is satisfied with his work is tempted to make no further effort to improve. Never discouraged, because he who gives way to discouragement is already defeated." Shall we not take it as a motto for the life as well as its work, for the self as well as its service? To become and to do, ever going on to perfection—it is the Divine law of the spiritually imperfect, and the promise of a "better country, that is, a heavenly." "Wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city."

UNRECOGNISED SINS

"I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord."—*I Cor. iv.* 3, 4.

Contextual reading, iii. 18—*iv.* 5.

Of all the great Apostle's confessional words, I do not know one more searching or serviceful. His opponents accused him of fickleness, of fear, of unfaithfulness, in his ministry. But his own conscience did not confirm the accusation. He could not conscientiously say, "I have been untrustworthy among you as a minister of Christ." He must aver concerning this matter, "I know nothing against myself." Nevertheless, he adds that this freedom from conscious unfaithfulness as God's steward does not justify him, because he is not a competent judge in his own case: there is but one Judge, the Omniscient and All-holy. And to His eye faults and sins might appear of which Paul himself was unconscious.

Surely if ever a man had spiritual insight into his own nature and the spirit of his own mind, this man had. If ever a man could know whether he were wholly blameless in moral conduct, we

might have expected this man to know it. His whole life had been lived as in the immediate presence of the God of truth. Did ever a Christian receive more fully the revelation of the inner life of Jesus Christ? Did ever a soul show a keener consciousness of moral evil? "To me who would do good, evil is present." Was ever a soul delivered from sin with a more manifest deliverance? "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." Yet he will not say to his fault-finding critics, "I am blameless, I am justified."

It is needful to mark the difference between "I know of none" and "I know that there is none." For a sentinel to say "I see no enemy lurking about the camp," or a critic, "I see no error in this book," or an able-bodied man, "I am conscious of no symptoms of disease," does not justify him in the assertion that there is no enemy, no error, no disease. In like manner, for a Christian to say, "I am conscious of no sin," does not justify him in an assertion of sinlessness.

Search me, Lord, with this lighted lamp of Thy word. To feel nothing in the heart contrary to Christian love is not to have been made perfect in love. The All-seeing and All-holy is Judge, not I.

WHAT IS IT TO KNOW THE LORD?

"Was not this to know me? saith Jehovah."—*Jer. xxii.* 16.

Contextual reading, vv. 13-17.

JOSIAH'S reign had been made illustrious by the destruction of idol-worship, the finding and reading of the Book of the Law, and the celebration of the Passover with great munificence. But it is not with these things that this question of Jehovah—which indeed is the strongest of affirmations—is concerned. It is with the king's dealing with the poor of the land. King Josiah did "justice and righteousness," "he judged the cause of the poor and needy": "was not *this* to know me, saith Jehovah."

Knowledge is through experience. I can know nothing of an unseen colour, or an unheard sound, except in so far as it is like a colour I have already seen, or a sound I have already heard. I could form no idea of a trait of character that was utterly unlike all that I had experienced in myself. Only the good can understand the good, only the pure the pure, only the loving the loving. Therefore one can know God

only so far as one becomes like Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

Josiah might have burned to ashes every idol in the land, and celebrated the Passover with hitherto unimagined wealth of offerings and attendance of worshippers, yet if he had built his house by unrighteousness, the woe of unacquaintance with God would have been resting on him. But to be righteous is to be able to know the Righteous One.

Both as individuals and as classes, the pitiably poor are with us still. Their poverty may be brought upon them by physical disabilities, or by habits of vice; but it may also be due to the industrialism of the time. They are unrighteously dealt with. Advantage is taken of their weakness and necessity. From childhood they are stunted in body and in soul, through the oppression of inhuman greed. Shall we pray for them—and their oppressors? Here in Thy presence, Thou God of the poor and needy, I would rather seek to know my own responsibility for their sufferings. What am I doing in their behalf? O for the heart of a brother, tender, wise, strong, dutiful, toward my needy brother-men. This would be to know Jehovah, the Righteous and Compassionate, the Lord of us all.

TWO VOICES OF GOD

"Then Jehovah answered Job out of the whirlwind."—*Job xxxviii.* 1.

"And after the fire, a still small voice. . . . And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"—*I Kings xix.* 12, 13.

Contextual reading, I Kings xix. 9-18.

THUS to contending seer and dispirited prophet, to each according to his need, the Eternal and Most Merciful spoke, in that distant day. But with the same two voices, in the terror of the tempest and in a "sound of gentle stillness," is He not speaking now and always?

It is so in nature. When the heavens are black with clouds, while the thunders peal and the lightnings fling forth their messengers of death, and the storm-wind tramples the startled earth, it is an insensitive heart that does not hear, awe-stricken, the word of the Father of infinite majesty bidding it, "Be still, and know that I am God." But it is an equal listlessness of spirit that hears no word of God in clouds that are bright and peaceful, or in the opening buds of spring, or in such "a miracle of design" as a simple seashell—

"Small, but a work divine,
Frail, but of force to withstand
Year after year, the shock
Of cataract seas."

It is so in the universal human experience of trembling pain and of quiet gladness. The overmastering storm of grief may shut one in with God as in some unfamiliar sanctuary, awful yet lighted with His glory and opening out upon paths of peace. But how much more numerous are the sweet and pleasant things of life—the faces of friends, the winsomeness of little children, the delights of sense, the mornings and evenings, the myriad pleasing conditions, that tell, each in its own still small voice, of the tender, loving presence of the God who made us.

It is so in the innermost spiritual being, where is the throne of conscience and moral love. Here they that have sown to the wind reap the whirlwind; and out of it, if they will but hearken, speaks the voice of God Himself calling to repentance. But there is also the gentle everyday guidance of the spirit; there is the Light that lighteth every man, illuming the soul as swiftly yet softly as the light of the morning overspreads the earth.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"—*Micah vi.* 8.

Contextual reading, Mat. xxii. 34-40.

SHALL these requirements of the good life be taken as standing apart, with no vital interconnection? Justice and kindness toward fellowmen and communion with the Most High—may one of these laws of the spirit be obeyed and the other disregarded? It may not be. Men, indeed, have often tried to keep them apart; but God has joined them together, and the two are one. Never shall I render my brother that perfect human justice and kindness which are his due, till I see in him, however imperfect or depraved, something of a divine humanity, and am thus brought near to the God whom it pleased to create man after His own likeness. And never shall I be able at the same time to love God and wrong my fellow.

A letter came from a friend which said that hereafter the word of Christianity would be "not

our Father but *our brother*"—the religion of humanity. Why will men be so unthinking and one-sided? For what would be the worth of my brother if neither he nor I had a Father in heaven? What would become of all spiritual values? The child's first and deepest relation in the household—yes, and ever the deepest from birth to death—is with the father and mother. Brotherhood, sisterhood, follows inseparably—implying a common parenthood. "The word of Christianity must be *our brother*"; then it must be also, and first, *our Father;* else how could brotherhood be? Nay, even a single human soul is inconceivable without the Divine Fatherhood; for otherwise how could it have ever risen up in personal being, and affirmed itself, Here am I?

God is unseen, but here is my brother whom I see. Do I take advantage of his ignorance in trade? do I use him for my purposes instead of reverencing him as myself? do I speak to him harshly? am I unforgiving and unkind? And then do I go kneel down and pray, or stand up and sing, "O for a closer walk with God"? I do not really mean that prayer; for God came to me and greeted me in my brother, and I refused to answer. O God, to walk with men, in the name of Thy Son, that would be a closer walk with Thee.

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

"And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it."—*Ecc. xii, 7.*

Contextual reading, vv. 13, 14.

THERE are stories which, once heard, are not likely to be forgotten, or to lose their charm. One such is that of King Edwin's council, more than twelve centuries ago, when the Christian missionaries were asking to be received, and one of the King's chief men rose and said that this life seemed to him like the flight of a sparrow through a lighted hall, where warriors and ministers were feasting. A few moments of light and safety, and the poor bird is out again in the darkness whence it came. There was truth in the barbarian's pathetic figure, the same truth as in the earlier lament of the cultured Greek: "How did I come to be? Whence am I? Wherefore did I come? To pass away." And there was prayer, the yearning for some such higher truth as the pagan faith of the people had not brought them, and the missionaries, knocking at their doors, had come to teach. For this was the teaching: In the darkness, before birth and

after death, is the God of the living. He it is who raised us up in personal being to go upon the swift journey of life; He will raise us up out of death at its end. Our present temporary dwelling-place does not contain Him; eternity is His habitation.

Whence could my intelligence have come save from the Eternal Reason? Aspiration, prayer, the sense of moral law, holiness, love, the supreme fact of personality—could these have arisen out of that which is immeasurably lower than they? They have come down, like all living fountains, from the Heights; they have come out from the Infinite; they are the gifts, I am the child, of the Personal Eternal God. O Thou who hast made me in Thine own image, and taught me to look up out of the dust and say, "Thou art my God," none can snatch me out of Thy hand or crush my being into nothingness. Not the shadow that men call death: for through that shadow the personal spirit shall return to its Father and God. Let the darkness linger: it is only upon our own minds, not upon Him. Having speedily served its purpose, it will vanish, and God, who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all, will remain—and we shall be with Him.

THE DIVINE INHERITANCE

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places;
Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

—*Psa. xvi.* 6.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

WHEN each one's little farm was allotted him in Canaan, it was an inalienable heritage. Happy the man, in any generation, who found himself heir to land whose lines enclosed such pleasant places as olive groves, rich pastures, or springs of water. But happier far was the writer of this Psalm. For his was in a transcendent sense a goodly heritage. It was Jehovah Himself.

"I have said unto Jehovah, Thou art my Lord,
I have no good beyond Thee. . . .
Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup."

Does it seem a daring figure? It is most deeply true. For what is the divinest giving known on earth? Not that of gifts, but that of the giver himself. And beyond it there is nothing. This then must illustrate, in its meagre,

earthly way, the self-giving of God. What is the child's heritage from true-hearted parents? It is themselves: their life lived over again in the child. The Psalmist had not been taught to look up to heaven and say, "Our Father"; but the truth of sonship to God was half-revealed in this truth of the Divine heritage.

On the lintel of a door in one of the oldest houses in Great Britain is the legend: "The providence of God is my inheritance." Who it was that put such an inscription over the doorway of his home, nobody knows. But what was in the heart of him who did it, is not difficult to imagine. Better than any inherited estate is the lifelong experience of God's providing care. But the experience of a much more ancient man has put upon our lips a larger expression of this truth to-day: The God of providence is my inheritance.

Our God and Father, what words are these that I dare to utter? Yet it cannot be real humility to disbelieve that which bears the certain marks of Thy teaching, and refuse to claim as one's own that which Thou hast offered in the Scriptures of truth, in Thy Spirit's inspirations, in Jesus Thy Son. Let me not despise or refuse my birthright.

THE UNSEEN SIGNIFICANCE OF LOVE

"She hath anointed my body beforehand for the burying. And verily I say unto you, Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."—*Mark xiv.* 8, 9.

Contextual reading, vv. 3-8.

THE Master whom she would fain honour with her cruse of ointment was infinitely more than Mary knew. The broken cruse also had a meaning to Him and a consequence to herself, that could in no wise have entered her mind or influenced her will. Jesus accepted it as an anointing for His burial from the cross of Calvary. For on the morning of the third day, with their offering of spices and ointment in their hands,

> "The other women came too late,
> For He had left the tomb."

And as to the name of this simple village maiden being written in Holy Scripture, and told as an example of uncalculating love to the Christ wherever in all the world the gospel should be

preached—that could not have been pictured or hinted in her farthest-reaching dream.

What had she to give in honour of her Lord? A cruse of precious ointment? That was nothing. Had she asked Him beforehand, "Shall I give it to the poor, or shall I break it over Thy head?"—we could easily suppose Him to have bidden her make it a means of ministration to the poor. The precious ointment was not her real gift: it was only the outward and spontaneous expression of the giving of a life, a heart, a self. That is what this woman had to give. But the very same have I. And who can tell in any case what such an offering may mean? What significance may it possess in the eyes of all-seeing Love? What use may He have for it in His present and coming Kingdom? What fruit may it bear, that I cannot even distantly imagine, in this wide world and unto the eternal ages? My blessed Lord, I will not seek to know. I will indulge no vain curiosity. Enough if Thou shouldst accept the service. Enough that I should be the least in the kingdom of heaven. Mercifully accept *me,* Lord, and let that be my eternal joy. For what good can there be or what reward beyond Thyself?

ROYAL MANHOOD

"And I will give him the morning star."—*Rev. ii.* 28.

Contextual reading, vv. 18-29.

It is the prophecy of the coming Day of heaven, and as such the prophecy not only of knowledge and joy, but also of power and sovereignty. Indeed, a star was an ancient symbol of royal power.

> "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
> And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

Which prediction of the unwilling seer of Pethor was more than fulfilled in Him who declared from on high,

> "I am the root and the offspring of David,
> The bright, the morning star."

So here in the word of promise to the church in Thyatira: "To him will I give authority over the nations . . . and I will give him the morning star."

It is a promise, then, of redeemed and perfected manhood. For the king is the highest man. The very word means "*the* man of his race"—as

the word "queen" means "*the* woman." He that overcometh shall have dominion; he shall wield a sceptre and wear a crown. The meaning can only be that he shall be perfected—shall be clothed with the power and greatness that he had in God's own creative idea of man. Thou "crownest him with glory and honour." But sin, alas! enters in to discrown him. Sin steals away his strength, dignity, glory. The king has become a slave. Whoso commits sin is the slave of sin. But in Christ is restoration. Salvation from sin is salvation into the divine humanity revealed in the Son of Man.

Kingship, sovereignty, power—what then is it? First of all, it is self-control. It is to rule one's own spirit. It is to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." It is to deny the anarchy of independence, and enter into the freedom, peace, and power of harmony with the immutable law of righteousness. This is to be made a prince before God and a son of the Most High.

My Saviour, only Thou art able to do this mighty work. Only at Thy cross may I receive a crown. Only through the warfare in which Thou art the conquering Leader may I be perfected. And then shall I have Thy leadership still in the Eternal Morning.

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."—*Rev. ii.* 7, 11, 17, 29; *iii.* 6, 13, 22.

Contextual reading, John xvi. 7-15.

THE Spirit's teaching is not for the churches only: it is for all men everywhere. One may well speak of the sunlight, filling the dome of heaven and overflowing the earth, as universal—notwithstanding the fact that there is more of it on the mountain summits and the open plains than in forest glades or shut-in dwellings or ocean depths. So it is, likewise, with the light of God, which is the presence of His Spirit, in the souls of men.

But "the churches" can receive more of it than can "the world." They can receive more of it than could Jesus' disciples themselves before His glorification. Was it not His own word at the Last Supper, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"? He said them afterwards—is He not saying them still through the Christian ages?—by the Spirit of truth. It could not be that before Jesus' death

the Spirit should show, even to the largest-hearted disciple, the fulness of Christian truth. Because the work of redemption had not yet been fully wrought, and so the materials of the Spirit's teaching had not yet been fully given. But now, with the Cross and the Resurrection to interpret, with the whole Christ to reveal unto the believing heart, He could indeed be the leader into "all the truth."

Therefore it is now the Spirit's call to the churches, "He that hath an ear, let him hear." In doctrine, in worship, in work, in polity, in missionary enterprise, in all things, let them welcome this Divine leadership. Let the attitude of every congregational meeting be that of the uplifted heart, as at Pentecost, awaiting the Spirit's light and power. Would we know the truth and pursue the right, and wisely determine what the Israel of God ought to do? There are means to be used, there is the reason and the conscience to be followed; but these, O Spirit Divine, are not Thyself, and it is only in Thy light that they can rightly direct our steps. So would we trust ourselves, with incorrupt minds, each for himself, and all with one accord for the Church, to Thy leadership, unerring, unwearied, unending.

THE DIVINE COMPANION

"Noah walked with God."—*Gen. vi.* 9.

Contextual reading, Micah vi. 6-13.

LIFE is not a couch, nor a wilderness, nor a wind-borne wave, but a pathway. It means activity, progress, destination. It implies a *whence* and a *whither*. It suggests, moreover, the need of guidance and companionship.

"Noah walked with God." Let not such a word from that far-away time fall meaningless upon our ears. Often have we prayed, "When life's trials are over, take us unto Thyself." Let us oftener pray, "In the midst of life's trials, take us into conscious companionship with Thee."

We may not cease to sing the Christian battle-song,

> "Fight on, my soul, till death
> Shall bring thee to thy God."

But neither must we ever forget that God is with us in this life, and that we may live in spirit as well as in physical fact, very near to Him here. When it was said to a dying man, in a present-day story, "You will soon be with God," the

answer was, "I have been with Him all my life." So there is another song of the soul that has been given us to sing:

> "Close to Thee, close to Thee,
> All along my pilgrim journey,
> Saviour, let me walk with Thee."

"Noah walked with God." We thank Thee, Lord, that even in that dark and godless day, when Thou wast grieved in Thy heart with a world that would none of Thy ways, there were those who knew Thee as the ever-present One. They had no Scriptures, they had no sacraments, they lacked the knowledge, culture, civilisation, Christianity, in which, as in an atmosphere charged with great ideas and incentives, we have lived from the very dawn of life. Yet their hearts went a-search for Thee, and Thou wast found of them. In the spiritual loneliness of life they felt the touch of a heavenly Hand; and so they had power to walk life's pathway humbly, reverently, hopefully, with Thee. May we listen to Thy voice, and Tell Thee all that is in our hearts, as did these ancient sons of Thine. So, in this holy converse, will Thy presence become a conscious reality.

WHOM SHALL WE TRUST?

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God."—*Mark xi, 22.*

Contextual reading, vv. 15-26.

"HAVE *faith*"—which means not only to believe, but to believe in. To believe a person is to accept his word as true; to believe in a person is to accept him as true. We believe when we can say, "He will not intentionally deceive me"; we believe in when we can say, "He will not fail me." The one is a question of truthfulness, which is much; the other a question of truth, which is all.

Moreover, to believe in a person is, under suitable circumstances, to commit one's self to him. Is he trustworthy? Then in time of need he will be actually trusted. Do we believe in the physician? Then in case of sickness we will put our own life, or a dearer, into his hands. It is not simply a matter of the conviction of the intellect: it is a repose of the heart and an act of the will. Faith in a person is practically trust.

"Have faith in"—*man?* It is natural and right to do so. Childhood has become proverbial for belief and trust, and is therein a fitting type

of the Christian spirit. That is a morbid mental state in which one threatens to doubt everybody. As the book I hold in my hand would, without the force of cohesion, fall into a myriad particles, so would the unity of society, without mutual confidence, fall apart into its multitudinous units. A man would meet his fellow only to avoid or to use him.

Nevertheless, one's trust is often misplaced; and one's deepest needs cannot be met even through the strongest possible faith in the strongest possible man. Is there then a higher, a truer, a stronger? Yes, there is an Absolute Truth, an Infinite Life, an Omnipotent Friend.

"Have faith *in God.*" Thou self-existing One, Father of spirits, upon Thee would I cast not simply my burden, but myself. Thou art evermore the same.

> "Change and decay in all around I see.
> O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

However it may sometimes seem to our dimness of vision, Thou canst not fail any trusting soul. Through Thee we shall be able to remove mountains, and nothing shall be impossible to the soul that wills to rest in Thine almighty will.

THE VISION OF NEED

"There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. . . .

"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely."—*Acts xvi.* 9, 23.

Contextual reading, vv. 10-22.

Apparently the two scenes do not fit well together—the beckoning hand and the rude arrest, the beseeching voice and the Roman scourge and imprisonment. Reading the first passage, one would be prepared to find large and eager congregations awaiting the missionaries over-sea, or even a great national conversion. But instead of this, the inner prison and the stocks.

Shall we say, then, that the Man of Macedonia represented only a few devout Jewish women, like Lydia, whose hearts were quite ready to open under the touch of Jesus Christ the Crucified? No, not that: he stood for the whole of Macedonia, the whole of Greece, the whole European continent. But not for the people's wishes or likings, not for the things they were

consciously asking. He stood for the spiritual *necessities* of paganism. It was the voice of need, not of desire, that cried, "Come over and help us."

The child does not ordinarily beg to be taught to read, nor the savage to be civilised, nor the slum-dweller to be led into clean and wholesome living, nor the careless sinner to be converted. But the wise and good will bring them the appropriate supply, till it awake the sleeping demand.

One's needs are more real than one's wishes. The need, not the wish, is the permanent and constitutional element of the soul. The need is the man.

Let us be content, therefore, that the missionary vision is not that of actual outstretched hands, eager eyes, pleading voices, hungry souls. It is the vision of spiritual need. The Christian evangelist is a *messenger*—not a called-one, but a sent-one.

Our Master, let no bearer of Thine evangel think it strange when, like Thyself, he must come uninvited or unwelcome.

THE APOSTLESHIP OF DISCIPLES

"And looking up to heaven, He blessed, and brake and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude."—*Mat. xiv.* 19.

Contextual reading, vv. 15-21.

It was what Jesus did continually. The disciples were intermediaries: he put into their hands that which they were to convey to others. That was their apostolate. "Freely ye received; freely give." He taught them many things, and His word to them was indeed for the sanctification of their own souls—"ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you"—but also through them for the salvation of the world.

It was to be proclaimed from the housetops. Men would not accept this word as universally and as hungrily as they ate the loaves in the desert place. They might even imprison or put to death the messengers who brought it. Nevertheless it was needed by them, and so must be offered to them. And whosoever does receive it at any time in the long succession of Christian discipleship, shall share it with others. That is the

law: he shall share the truth of Christ with others.

Give me, O Spirit of Christ, that bread of God, lest I perish. But no sooner do I begin to enjoy it selfishly, eating my morsel alone, than it turns to ashes in my hands. Let me mediate Thy word to others. How came it to me, save through the mediation of others—of Apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, preachers, writers, obscure and humble men and women, Christian friends in Christ that have blessed and glorified my life? I also would be a bread-giver from Thy table to all who are gathered about Thy gate—not waiting till they shall ask, for their necessities are asking now and evermore. Let me cross the seas, if need be, obedient to the vision of the Man of Paganism crying "Come over and help us," even though it should be to the inner prison and the stocks. Through no indifference of mine, may any soul perish for lack of knowledge.

WISDOM FROM GOD

"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God."—*I Cor. i.* 30.

Contextual reading, vv. 18-31.

Not mere knowledge, but knowledge practically applied and wrought into a habit of the soul.

Insatiable is the desire to know. Think of the flood of literature pouring forth from the press, and the constant observing and experimenting that go on everywhere in the civilised world—witnesses that as man rises into the realisation of himself he is found more and more to be in quest of fact and truth. On the tomb of an English historian is the inscription, "He died learning."

But knowledge is chiefly to be valued for wisdom's sake. It is good to know, it is better to do, it is best of all *to be*. One will not withhold admiration from a De Long perishing in the snows of Siberia on a vain search for the North Pole; but a higher approbation is due a Livingstone dying, as an undaunted explorer, in the heart of Africa, that the blessings of civilisation and Christianity may be brought to the habita-

tions of cruelty. Light is to walk by rather than to look at.

We would know ourselves and our relations to the infinite. Does the Almighty care what will befal in our experience, and will He help us? What is the whence and whither of life? The answer is not in the unveiling of ten thousand strange and momentous facts which we long to perceive, so that we may read nature and the soul and the future as an open book. It is in Him who was made unto us wisdom from God. Knowledge? Yes, such knowledge of the Divine, and hence of the human, as could have come from no other source. Not in the words of all the teachers, nor in the lives of all the saints, is there any such revelation of God as in the words, and life, and person of Him concerning whom it was testified from on high, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and who calmly declared concerning Himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Neither is there any other such disclosure of the depths of human sinfulness and the deeper depths of redeeming love, as in the Sacrifice of Calvary.

But it is not to satisfy curiosity. It is to regenerate the heart and guide the conduct. That Life is our law. Christ is our wisdom from God, the Light of the world *that we may follow Him.*

RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."—*Matt. v.* 6.

"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness."—*I Cor. i.* 30.

Contextual reading, vv. 18-31.

Deep in the human heart, under the touch of the Holy Spirit, there is a sense of the need of righteousness, and some desire for its fulfilment. Few will refuse to acknowledge, however slow to obey, the law of Duty, and to confess "I should like to be what I ought to be." Blessed are they in whom the desire is a real hunger and thirst; for they shall receive that which they ask for.

They shall receive it, not earn it or work it out for themselves. They shall be forgiven, not forgive their own sins. They shall be born from above, not create their own hearts anew. "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

That is not a formal, but a vital word that is recorded of the father of the faithful: "And he believed in Jehovah; and He reckoned it to him for righteousness." Shall we ponder this word a moment? My flowers are in a dark room,

and with all possible effort, I cannot give them health and colour: on the contrary, they are ready to die. I will cease such effort, and simply throw open the blinds. Instantly enters the sunlight, and every drooping leaf and blossom lifts its head and begins really to live again. The opening of the blinds may be reckoned for life to the flowers. I am quite ignorant; I have tried of myself to acquire a certain store of knowledge, and cannot. But a teacher is knocking for admission: I will open the door. He enters and imparts the desired information and culture. The opening of the door to the teacher may be reckoned for knowledge. I am sick and cannot cure myself: I will let the physician have his own way with me. I am saved from threatening death. Receiving the physician may be reckoned for restored health. Abraham could not make himself righteous, but he believed in God —opened the door of his heart to Him—and God entering in, by the might of His own presence and grace made him a righteous man. The opening of his heart to God was reckoned for righteousness.

So, likewise, is it to-day, when any heart is opened to God in Christ Jesus

THE SPIRIT OF HEARING

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven churches."—*Rev. i.* 10, 11.

Contextual reading, vv. 9-20.

JOHN had heard that very voice from lips of flesh and blood. In his native Galilee, on many a gladly solemn day, had Jesus' words, ill understood but never to be forgotten, fallen upon his wondering heart. Now the Voice speaks in other tones, which he must be detached from all consciousness of outward things, in spiritual rapture, that he may hear. In this sense he must be "in the Spirit"; but it is the same Spirit of truth that shall abide with Jesus' disciples evermore, showing them, through the illumining of their Lord's own words, the vision of God.

O that every day of life might be a true Lord's day. As by the power of the Eternal Spirit He rose from the dead, so may the power of that same Spirit quicken our hearts to see that we refuse not Him that speaketh. Then even on dreary Patmos the Voice may be heard.

But he who would know the quickening power of the Spirit must be willing to live and walk therein. To be "in the Spirit"—have we failed to learn the meaning of that word for the Christian life? It is not a word for dreaming, for saying formulas of prayer, for feeling the beauty and pathos of the gospel. It means to put away every evil thing, to be pure in heart, to do the truth toward one's brother, to yield one's self up to the will of the holy and ever-present God. Thus will ours be indeed the listening mind; and from whatever direction God's voice may come, and whether it be as the sound of a trumpet or in tones of gentle stillness, we shall hear. Reasoning is good, and scholarship, and the high imaginations of genius, but it is better to be thus immediately taught of God. Those are "good gifts," this is a "perfect gift"; and all "from above." Thou Father of lights, in Thee shall we see and hear, and learn what is Thy will.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COMPANIONSHIP

"Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise."—*Prov. xiii.* 20.

Contextual reading, Mark iii. 13-19.

To begin with, one must have something of the spirit of wisdom before he will consent to walk with wise men. But it may be a mere beginning, as a grain of mustard-seed. Left to itself, it might soon perish; but nurtured habitually by the greater and gentler wisdom of another, it will grow into greatness. Unquestionably we become likeminded with those of whom we willingly make companions. Otherwise what parent would care whether his child's associates were good or bad? Think, for example, of an untrained youth brought into association with a man of knowledge, culture, experience, noble character—say as pupil with teacher and personal friend. He does not avoid, but with admiration and an open mind, seeks his society. Sensitively alive to the influence of such a personality, he companies with him from day to day. The result? That man's spirit will become

his spirit, that man's mind his mind; that man's life will be reproduced in the life of his young companion.

Which things are an allegory, setting forth a higher history. To walk with God is to become likeminded with Him. And here verily is the way of life. It is very simple, and in its simplicity sublimely significant. Let me think upon the name of my heavenly Father. Let me know Him as revealed in Jesus, who was His image and the very effulgence of His glory in humanity. Let me pray to Him, and listen to His words. Let me enter into His purpose. What then? I shall become pure-minded and pure-willed in His holiness, strong in His strength, wise in His wisdom. Some lineaments of His image—let me dare believe it—will pass into my character and be reflected from my daily life.

Am I willing? Make me willing, Lord, in this day of Thy power. Whatever spirit of goodness, or love of truth, or willingness to be conformed to Thy will, may have already been given, help me to obey its impulses and walk with Thee. I would hide no evil or doubtful secret in my heart, but would tell Thee all. Open-hearted to Thee—I can ask no larger faith nor any surer pledge of the blessed life.

THROUGH TRUTH TO PURITY

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—*I John i. 7.*

Contextual reading, vv. 5-10.

THE Apostle has just said that God Himself is "light"—or truth—and that "in Him is no darkness at all"—no ignorance or falsity or error. Therefore to walk in this light of God, which is the Divine truth that shines and searches through and through, is to see things as they are. It is to have knowledge of spiritual values. But if so, it must show men's faults and sins and all the unloveliness of their characters to their companions. Might it not be supposed, then, to tend toward separation rather than unity? No, it will ensure fellowship one with another. Because it will show something of the worth of men in the idea and purpose of God, who has said, "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Is it not revealed in Jesus His Son? There is an infinite worth in our nature, because more and more we may become like Jesus. More and more we may grow up into

that ideal humanity, in all its sweetness, purity, spirituality, brotherliness, and power, which was realised in Him.

No wonder then that Christianity, while revealing to men their sinfulness as they had never known it before, should at the same time have made them honour and love one another as never before. When it entered that hard, sad Roman world, such a precept as "Honour all men" was practically unknown. But the Christian looked upon men with other eyes. He saw in them accountability, immortality, possible conformity to the image of Christ. And fellow-Christians were united in the bond of the new commandment, to love one another even as their Master and Friend loved them.

"And the blood of Jesus His Son"—the atonement, the sacrifice, the love of the Crucified One—"cleanseth us from all sin." For those who are of the truth, walking in the light of God, hear His voice, and will not say "We have no sin," but will make confession unto salvation. And those who show forgiveness and love toward their brethren, having fellowship one with another, are open-hearted to receive forgiveness and love from God. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us."

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE TREASURE

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and the Saviour Jesus Christ."—*II Peter i.* 1.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-11.

One might well prefer the loss of all the other senses to that of sight. Mysterious and mighty, yet simplest of acts, is it *to see*—much too simple for analysis or description. It is merely to lift the eyelids—or let them lift themselves—those thin curtains of flesh that shut out the whole visible glory of the world. And the result? The rendering of the seer subject to the influence of the object seen. Look at the starry heavens: a sense of vastness, of splendour, of awe, is awakened in the soul. Look at a flower: an image of beauty passes into the mind. Look upon the face of a friend: the soul of the friend comes forth to meet one's own. The look from within is openness to the influence from without.

Faith is the power to see, apart from the bodily eyes. It is a looking upon spiritual realities, and above all, upon the face of the one supreme Real-

ity, God Himself—"as seeing Him who is invisible." Therefore it lays open the soul to the presence and power of God. "Look unto Me and be ye saved." Faith in God—"in the righteousness of our God and the Saviour Jesus Christ"—is not the doing of any work but the simple looking up of the soul, and its subjection, in this looking, to the power of God in Jesus Christ—to the power of His forgiving love, His renewing righteousness, His sanctifying Spirit. Who, then, shall attempt to measure its value?

A company of friends fell to talking one evening of the losses they had known in life. One told of dear ones of his household that had sailed on an ill-fated vessel; another of friends that had proved false; another of vanished wealth; another of the perished hopes of youth. Still another, the last of all to speak, said that his sorrow was greater than any of theirs.

> "Sad losses have ye met,
> But mine," said he, "is heavier yet,
> For a believing heart hath gone from me."

He had lost his faith in God. And they agreed that his was indeed the sorest bereavement of all. "Thine, said they, is life's last and heaviest loss."

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

"And having a great Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith."—*Heb. x.* 21, 22.

Contextual reading, vv. 19-25.

NEAR to the mercy-seat, and thereby near to one another. A father said to his son, on the eve of the boy's departure afar from the home of his childhood: "On such evenings at such an hour I will be looking at yonder moon, and thinking of you: do you also be looking upon it, thinking of me; and thus, though so far apart, we shall be as it were side by side." There was a lovely object, though hundreds of thousands of miles distant yet visible to them both, which, as by agreement they looked upon it at the same moment, might draw them in the thoughts of their hearts together.

It was a beautiful idea; but most beautiful for what it suggests—for its suggestion of the nearness in spirit of those who pray. "Let *us* draw near." In isolation, each for himself, and thinking of himself alone? No, but each for all, in the spirit of love and forgiveness, say-

ing in his prayer, *Our* Father. "Lord, Thou hast been *our* dwelling-place in all generations." It is in that Presence that the sense of a common humanity and of a Christian communion is kindled and purified. That is the meeting-place within the veil, glory-illumined,

> "where spirits blend,
> Where friend holds fellowship with friend."

Therefore, from his knees the man of prayer will go forth straightway to serve his brother.

It is a "sweetly solemn thought" which has come to us—has it not?—many a time, that we are not alone in prayer. In the very same moment ten thousand others are kneeling, unseen but none the less real, by our side. All have the same needs, and are passing through the same experiences. They for me, I for them, all for the coming of the heavenly Father's kingdom—at the one throne of grace we kneel together. May it indeed be in a brotherhood of the "true heart" and the "fulness of faith" toward Him who dedicated for us the new and living way.

SONSHIP AND SERVICE

"Son, go work to-day in the vineyard."—*Mat. xxi.* 28.

Contextual reading, vv. 28-32.

THERE is another parable of the vineyard, in which the labourers were hired in the market-place, and were indeed hirelings in spirit. They cared nothing for the vineyard or its owner, but only for their pay. No wonder, therefore, that, although fairly dealt with, they complained at their wages, accusing their employer of wrong-doing. "Thou hast made him equal with us who have borne the heat and burden of the day." But here, in to-day's lesson, the case is that of father and son. There is no bargain. There is neither promise nor payment of wages. The father simply bids the son, "Go work." He does not even say "in *my* vineyard," but "in the vineyard,"—as if it were his son's as well as his own.

The slave serves through dread of the lash, the hireling for his daily wage, the son in the spirit of love and duty. My soul, with what calling art thou called in the vineyard of God—in his "field," which is "the world"? Is it not thy

Father's world, and thy Father's work that is to be done therein? He has named thee neither "slave" nor "hireling," but "son." "Make me as one of thy hired servants." "But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe and put it on him. . . . for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Do thou then make answer promptly in the spirit of sonship. Take His statutes for thy songs. Make the doing of His will thy daily food.

I have read of an imaginative child who said, looking at a gorgeous sunset, "I should like to help God paint the sky." God does not need us for that; but He does have need of us to help save and bless the world, so as to make it a very kingdom of heaven. Shall we find such co-working with the Divine Worker other than a labour of love? Send forth, O God, the Spirit of Thy Son into our hearts, crying unto Thee, Father; so that we shall be no longer bondservants, but sons, and all our service be sweetened and ennobled by the filial motive.

FREEDOM WITH JOY

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them."—*Acts xvi.* 25.

Contextual reading, vv. 16-24.

THERE is an innate freedom of the will—or rather of the *man*—over which outward circumstances have no power. Said the strong and kindly stoic, Epictetus: "The tyrant will bind—what? The leg. He will take away—what? The head. What then can he not bind and take away? The will." But in the jail of Philippi is something better than mere freedom of choice—sublime though such a fact may be; something better than the retreat of the oppressed man into the citadel of his own power of self-determination, defying his enemy to enter; something better than stoic calmness and self-control. Here is freedom with a note of joy and praise, the freedom of the gladsome child in his father's house. The psalmist of the Return from the Captivity gratefully records: "Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing." But here are singing

captives—harps in their hands, not on the willows. About these two prisoners are the midnight, the stocks, the dampness and foulness and all the noisome things of the inner prison; on their bodies, the welts and bruises of the Roman scourge; and in their hearts—the joy of the Lord. Theirs is the enfranchisement of the spirit, the freedom of a Christlike love, the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It finds expression in prayer—as truly as in the Christian congregation or alone on the mountain-side or on the house-top, they can tell all that is in their hearts to Him whose they are and whom they serve; in praise—their hearts and even their lips are free to sing hymns of thanksgiving for unnumbered mercies; in the exertion of personal influence—their pagan fellow-prisoners are listening to these unwonted sounds of happy Christian worship. Think, my soul, of the freedom of the City of God. Who can harm the followers of that which is good? Who can set limits to the spirit of love? Who can enslave a son of God? The heavenward way is always and everywhere open. The spirit of a good life may pass through walls of stone and on unto the ends of the earth and through the ages. It is freedom with a song.

THE JUDGMENT OF LOVE

"So speak ye and so do as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty."—*James ii.* 12.

Contextual reading, Chap. i. 22-27.

"*A* LAW of liberty": are there then more than one? Yes, there are many. Any law is a law of liberty to him who has the impulse in his heart to obey it. Such a man does as he pleases, and at the same time obeys, because he pleases to do the very things which the lawgiver commands. If not commanded, he would do them. If he be at heart an honest man, for example, he will obey the law of the land that prohibits burglary, or that requires the payment of taxes, with entire freedom. He will pursue in such matters precisely the course he would pursue if there were no law of the land. Similarly if he love the things that the law of God requires—if, for example, he love reverence and worship and truth-telling and righteousness and kindness—he will practise these things, not under pressure of the penalty for disobedience, but freely from the heart. For the law is now to him not consciously commandments from without; it is the

spirit of his own inner life. "Yea, Thy law is *within my heart.*" Moreover, to love the law is to love God, of whose nature it is the moral expression, and to love men, "who are made after the likeness of God." Therefore, it is not simply the devotion of the heart to the supreme principles of truth and right, the passion for righteousness, that prompts this Christian obedience. It is a supreme personal reverence and affection.

Verily love is the law of liberty. And under its government the Christian soul is placed. To the man who says, "I pay every dollar's worth of indebtedness to my neighbour," the word is, Dost thou *love.* To the man who has much to say in devotional meditation, in prayer, or in preaching with tongue or pen, about love to God and man, the word is still the same, *Dost* thou love? By this law I am to be judged. Do I obey because I may or because I must? Is it in my heart to keep the commandments? Is it in me and of me, a likemindedness, an affinity, a compelling affection, a "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus?" O God, I cannot stand before the judgment seat of love. Not yet have I been made perfect. It is far above me. But do Thou, Lord of life, lift up my heart in Thy service, that I may go on in this good way.

VOICEFUL SILENCE

"Thou hast proved my heart; Thou hast visited me in the night."—*Psa. xvii.* 3.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

It is related of Elisha Kane, the Arctic explorer, that when he was asked in a company where someone had just told of a fearsome adventure, "And what is the most awful sight that you have ever witnessed?" he replied, with a serious, devotional expression on his face, "The silence of an Arctic night." In truth, the night, concealing to reveal, "great prophetess of holier worlds," is more eloquent in her silence than is the returning day with the noisy revival of industry in the streets. Her great heart seems palpitating with a mystery which she would fain disclose, if she might. It is a time—"the peaceful evening that brings all home"—for friendship and love. It is a time for meditation, for upward-looking, for hearkening in the hush of earth's voices to the deeply whispering voices from on high that seem to call, Come up hither.

But great is the profanation of the night. It

is the time of the evil-doer. It has been prostituted into a very gateway of hell. Under cover of its shadows, the traitor went forth, from the light and companionship of the Upper Room, to betray his Lord. Within its enshrouding darkness, every city of wickedness holds high unholy carnival. How can the pure eyes of God behold the nightly scene? How can He bear it? Have mercy, O God, and save our young men, save us all, from the abuse of the night.

May we have no wish for the darkness to cover any path which we purpose to follow. O to be children of the light and of the day! God of light, Thou art God of the darkness also, which is Thy pavilion of solemn splendour wherein Thou invitest the meditative and listening soul to enter, that it may see the shadowing forth of Thy glory and be still.

THE BOND OF VERACITY

"Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth, each one with his neighbour; for we are members one of another."—*Eph. iv.* 25.

Contextual reading, vv. 17-32.

Not only in the Church, which was no doubt the immediate subject of the Apostle's thought, is there an inter-related membership and a law of mutual helpfulness; but the same principle appears in all human society. The many are one. To live a true human life in isolation is as impossible as for a hand or an eye to live dissevered from the body. Therefore it is incumbent upon all to avoid the things which tend toward division, and to do the things which tend toward unity and peace. What things are these—justice and kindness? Undoubtedly; and it is one of the hopeful signs of our times, that this thought is becoming increasingly clear, and that the Church is awaking to the duty of the regeneration of society. We are members one of another—therefore let there be equitable government, industrial freedom, co-operation instead of destructive competition, sanitary laws, broth-

erly consideration. But such is not the thought in this particular passage of the Apostle's teaching. We are members one of another, he says, therefore *put away falsehood.* For truthfulness is a necessary bond of society. How should you know how to deal with me, or have social intercourse with me at all, without some confidence in my word? Absolute untruthfulness would be the destruction of all friendship and co-operation. It would be moral chaos—not a world.

Whatever it shall cost, may I put away lying, and in word and tone and act, speak the truth with my neighbour. It does not avail to say, "I will deceive him when it will do no harm, or when it will accomplish some positive good." For how can he know when, in my opinion, such will be the result of the deception? and how then can he trust me at all? Therefore in whatever measure I fail in veracity, I am so far a breaker of close-knit bonds and an enemy of society. Spirit of truth, make me willing that Thou shouldest dwell continually in my heart. Then shall my life be true, and my speech veracious.

THE CONTAGION OF JOY

"And in our comfort we joyed the more exceedingly for the joy of Titus, because his spirit hath been refreshed by you all."—*II Cor. vii.* 13.

Contextual reading, vv. 9-16.

It is a touching story that is told of Melanchthon, who, in a dark hour of the Reformation, hearing a child on the streets of Weimar sing Luther's Battle-song, said, "Sing on, my little girl, you little know whom you comfort." It needed contact with some great believing man like Luther, happy in the simple joy of life, full of the gladness of faith, absolutely courageous, glorying in Christ only, to strengthen the spirit of his less hopeful and strong-hearted co-labourer. And the fact that on this occasion that spiritual contact came through the unconscious ministry of a child, made it none the less human, and certainly no less divine.

We speak of a person's "presence." "He has a fine presence"—that is to say, an impressive appearance and bearing. But the word has a larger meaning. One's presence is the spontaneous expression of one's whole inner life. It

constitutes the larger part of his self-revelation. It is all about him, like a vision that others see, a temperature they feel, an atmosphere they breathe, a contagion they catch. Everyone coming within its little sphere is inescapably affected by it—his mental tone either lowered or heightened, either disturbed or tranquilised. Shall it then be a vision of the beauty of holiness, or of irritability and fretfulness and self-seeking, that the observer sees? Shall it be shadows or sunshine into which the friend enters?

There is a contagion against which I would take no precaution. It is the contagion of joy. Not the joy of the hypocrite or the worldling, but the joy of those whose heart is fully set within them to do their father's will. Let me therefore seek conpanionship with them. Let me keep their company, if possible. I need them. Let me catch their spirit. Then may I also become a joy-giver—not a burden upon my fellow-Christians, not a thorn in their flesh, not a lord of their faith, but a helper of their joy.

CHRIST IN THE HOME

"To-day I must abide at thy house."—*Luke xix.* 5.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-10.

SUPPOSE the Master should come again, as in that earlier time, and say some such word to me. Suppose that He should even abide at my house day by day. I think the cry of Simon Peter would rise instinctively to my lips: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And yet let me hope that there would be a real unwillingness that the prayer should be answered. In the home of a friend I have seen the motto: "Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation." It is a word that searches me through and through. Can my house bear that light? It cannot, it cannot. Yet, O Christ, whether we will or not, Thou art here. For Thou art Lord as well as Friend, and comest self-invited.

I read the gospel story, and am renewed in trustfulness and hope. For Thou camest not to condemn the world, but to save the world. Thou

didst enter as a guest the homes of all the people, of Pharisees and publicans, of thine own friends and disciples, with some great blessing to bestow. Thou didst rebuke, or convict, or teach, or speak the word of peace, according as the need might be. And art Thou not now and evermore the sanctifier of home-life? Art Thou not the creator of Christian homes? Are they not actually what they are ideally, little prototypes of the home in heaven, so far as Thy word is their law and Thy mind their ruling motive? Thou dost transmute their common meals into a communion of purity and love, and their trivial-seeming tasks into a divine service.

Be Thou, Lord, the Head of this household. Save us from all impurity, and self-indulgence, and unkindness, and ill temper, and evil speaking, by the might of Thy Spirit. Make Thy home in our home, even in our hearts. Then from the joy of Thy presence we may go forth strong and courageous for every battle of life.

THE RIVER CHEBAR

"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."—*Eze. i.* 1.

Contextual reading, Isa. vi. 1-10.

WHERE? Not with Isaiah in the Temple, glory-filled, nor with Zacharias burning incense in the Holy Place, not in the Lord's land, but hundreds of miles away, on the flat, common-place plains of Chaldea, by the side of a canal. A psalmist among the hills of Hermon, surrounded with taunting enemies, debarred from attendance with the multitude keeping holyday at the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem, cried out, "When shall I come and appear before God?" Here is the answer: God is wherever the seeker of Him may be. The heavens of revelation are bending over Mesopotamia as truly as over Palestine, and may be opened above any muddy canal-side, showing visions of God. "The whole earth is full of His glory." Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may see it.

Where could the need be greater than in the

everyday walks of life? For the light from heaven makes even the common day glorious. Eternity illumines time. It shows the Divine meaning in all things—in the work of the hands as well as of the heart and the brain, in the stones as well as in the stars. It may over-arch the foggy highway with rainbows and kindle the clouds into splendour.

We have been made to be up-lookers, and not in vain. From the work-shop, the kitchen, the ploughed field, may be seen interpreting and transfiguring visions of God. Will they disqualify us for the daily round of home duties? They will fit us the better for them. Looking earthward, I cannot know anything as it ought to be known, or do anything as it ought to be done. It is the unworldly that get the finest wealth out of the world, it is the meek that inherit the earth, it is the spiritually illumined that see their way most clearly among common affairs and employments. For which is better to walk and work by, sunlight or lamplight? He who would pick up a pebble from the roadside, does it by the light of the far-away sun. So is the simplest everyday work of life to be done in the light of heaven.

CONTENT WITH—WHAT?

"Be ye free from the love of money, content with such things as ye have; for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee."—*Heb. xiii,* 5.

Contextual reading, vv. 6, 20, 21.

A WOODCUTTER near the roadside. A rich man in his coach riding by. Wiping the sweat from his face, the woodcutter sighs, "I wish I were rich, and could ride." Looking through his coach window, the rich man also sighs,

> "I would give all my wealth
> For the strength and the health
> Of the man that is cutting the wood."

Each mistook the other, and neither was contented. What would have transfigured the lot of them both, was to mark, in the light of Christ, the relative values of sense and spirit, and to see the glory of God in His world. But in any case, better than the anxious or covetous comparing of our own condition with that of our

neighbour, is the appreciation of it as it is in itself.

"Content with such things as ye have." Lord, quicken our hearts with some true sense of the magnitude and meaning of the common things of life. Let me think upon the first one of them that comes to mind—the power of vision. What gold can measure its value? Suppose a man to quench the light of my eyes in total darkness, and then come with money or a mansion or some wealthy estate, as a proper equivalent of the glory taken away: he is cruelly mocking my sense of loss. This is a single example; but in truth could I reckon up all God's good gifts in my life, that would fall below a true reckoning of my riches. The best would still remain untold. Listen, then, my soul, to this greater word,—

"Content with such things as ye have; for"—what is it that we have? It is God Himself: "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." O Thou that speakest thus to the trusting soul, give or take away as Thou wilt, so Thou Thyself remainest, life's very Well-spring and Source, the almighty Friend of the soul, the one Giver of all gifts.

WHOM SHALL WE HEAR?

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."—*John i.* 14.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-13.

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." "If any stumble not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body also." Nothing so gives outward reality to the inner life as speech. More than any other form of self-expression, it is the man himself. If one could hear understandingly all that a man utters—exclamations, words, phrases, tones, sentences—premeditated or impromptu, from day to day, he would know the man.

Hence in the Greek language the same name is given to reason and speech, to the inner and the outer mental life. And this is the name by which the Lord Jesus Christ is here called. He is the Logos, the Word, the Divine Reason in the act of utterance.

My heavenly Father, I remember how Thou

hast bidden, "Hear ye Him." I remember how He Himself has declared, "I am the truth." Therefore shall not the listening attitude of the soul be that of receptiveness to Christ Himself? To receive Him is to receive knowledge, truth, wisdom, all words in the one Eternal Word.

The child lifts up its face to the mother, and receives from look and touch and tone, much more than the mere words of instruction impart. The mother herself with and in her teaching, is far greater than the teaching alone. Indeed, in the case of all great teachers, the lecture or text-book is not the chief thing. The teacher, in his personality and living presence, as the truth transfused into a man, suggesting, inspiring—that is the most illuminative and life-giving lesson. Let us venture to speak thus in parables of Christ Himself as present and teaching in "the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth." It was much to have Him tabernacle among us, in the days of His flesh, and to "behold His glory." It is more to have Him abide within, ensphering the soul in the light of life.

THE GREATER GLORY

"When, therefore, he heard that he was sick, he abode at that time two days in the place where he was."—*John xi.* 6.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-45.

WHY *therefore?* One might have supposed that some such word as *nevertheless* would have been used. Verily, no; it is the causal connective that contains the very heart of the story. It was because Jesus loved this household that He stayed away when there was sickness in the house. How could that be? The Master made it plain when, coming a little later, He showed them a greater glory than would have been possible before. "Said I not unto thee that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" They would have known Him as a healer of sickness; He made Himself known as the Resurrection and the Life.

What are a Christian's unanswered prayers? He asked that his friend might be spared severe hardship and grief, might realise the dreams of his youth, might have his labours crowned with success, might be gladdened from day to day by

the smiles of those whom he loved. Instead, there was laid upon that dear one the cross of pain. But there also entered into his life a peace that passeth understanding, a joy that no man can take away, a power that is made perfect in weakness, a wealth of character that is better than any outward prosperity.

He asked for himself an ecstatic experience. He would fain see face to face. He would be thrilled with such waves of heavenly light as should lift him far above the common earth, and make all doubt or misgiving or susceptibility to temptation impossible. And no such elation of spirit was ever given in answer to the prayer. But there did come into his experience an assurance of the fatherhood and providence of God in Jesus Christ which he wisely esteems a greater glory.

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Let me dwell in the house of pain, and the steps of the Divine Healer delay, if so be that He shall come, as He will come to those who trust and wait for Him, in the glory of a larger revelation and a fuller redemption.

HEREAFTER

"Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter." —*John xiii. 7.*

Contextual reading, vv. 1-20.

How long would Simon Peter have to wait for the promised light to fall upon this unexpected act of Jesus? *Hereafter*—what did the Teacher mean by that word? It was only a few minutes till an explanation was made: "I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." It was for example's sake.

But that was not all. Afterward a further explanation was given by the Spirit who came as the interpreter of Jesus. Under His teaching, Simon Peter could understand still better the glory of service, and how it is the very nature of God Himself, the heavenly King, to minister in love to His children; and so he could write, in his epistle to the "sojourners of the Dispersion," "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another," and "above all things, being fervent in your love among yourselves."

But still later, in the all-discovering light of

heaven, with what deep and radiant meanings must this lowly ministering of his Lord on earth have appeared to the understanding of this redeemed disciple.

Mysteries of nature, mysteries of providence, mysteries of grace, mysteries of the life of Jesus —I thank Thee, Lord, for the unveiling of them even in this life, where it must needs be that we know only in part. Many things that once perhaps seemed dark, we may understand, if we will. For Thou art ever sending forth lifters of the veil. Science is from Thee—filling the mind with endless delight in the discovery of energies and laws. Philosophy is from Thee—daring to look down into the depths of being, and at the immanent Reason and Will in the energy and the law. Experience is from Thee—showing the harmony in many a seeming contradiction and the gain in many a loss. Holy Scripture is from Thee—an ever-growing light revealing Thy Saviourhood and Fatherhood, making wise unto salvation. Above all, the Spirit of truth is in the world, taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto believing men.

Still Thou hast many things to say unto us, which we cannot now receive. The progress of the sons of light in knowledge—can it ever have an end? "Thou shalt understand *hereafter*."

THE ONENESS OF LOVE

"And behold a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon."—*Matt. xv.* 22.

Contextual reading, vv. 21-28.

A MOTHER'S prayer. And how significant the turn of thought in which, unconsciously, it found expression. Not, Have mercy on *me, I* am vexed with a demon; nor, Have mercy on *my daughter, she is* vexed with a demon; but, Have mercy on *me, my daughter* is vexed with a demon. The mother-heart counted the daughter's trouble as its own. Love, the unifier, had made of them twain one soul. Mercy to her daughter was mercy to herself.

Let us read it as a parable of Christ and His Church. For, all the might of human love—what is it but a sign of the Eternal Love out of which it has arisen? "We love"—both God and one another—"because He first loved us." In the oneness of an infinite, self-giving love, their Lord has made His disciples—even the "least" of His "brethren"—one with Himself. There-

fore, whatever is done to them, or to any of them, is done to Him.

Now we can understand how the Christ from glory, appearing to Saul the persecutor of the Church, could say, "Why persecutest thou *me?*" —and how Saul himself, now become "Paul a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle," could urge the Christians of Corinth not only to follow their own consciences, but also to have a tender regard for less enlightened consciences, with the motive, "Sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin *against Christ*"; and how upon the face of every little child that is born into the world there falls the light of a love Divine which interprets the word, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me."

Genesis tells of a Hebrew patriarch who, sitting in the door of his tent at noon-day, saw an opportunity to entertain angels unawares—and improved it gladly. The Gospels tell of an infinitely greater opportunity—and it is ours. "I was hungry, and ye gave Me to eat."

THE PATIENCE OF SPIRITUAL CULTURE

"And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience."—*Luke viii.* 15.

Contextual reading, vv. 4-14.

THERE is need of patience for fruit-bearing. Walking in the orchard on a balmy day of spring, one exclaims, How quickly the leaves and blossome have put out—like magic! But think how long the trees have been growing and waiting for this result, and remember that each unfolding bud was formed beneath last summer's sky, and carefully folded away against storm and frost for the long winter's sleep unto this day. Men plant trees, indeed, for the coming years and generations. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth"—even for the grain of an annual plant, beset as it is with innumerable evils—"being patient over it."

The same grace of patience is called for in other spheres of life and effort. The beautiful home that charms the passer-by was gained by taking the familiar path to the place of business, and attending there to endless details of work

with hand and brain, in the face of drawbacks and disappointments, morning by morning, day after day, through perhaps twenty or twice twenty years of its owner's life. The Christian preacher's sermon, whose luminous language seems to fall of itself from his lips, is a product, it may be, of an equal period of experience and labour. The writer's book, over whose pages the mind of the reader may go lilting along without effort, was probably planned, written, interlined, re-written, revised, written again, every sentence scrutinised, in many hours of solitary thought, through the best years of its author's life, and with no certain hope of its success or even of its publication—a work of faith, a labour of love, a patience of hope.

Let me call to mind such facts and apply their principle to the spiritual life. So many prayers, church-goings, readings of Scripture, meditations, forms of devotion, resistances of temptation, attempts at beneficence; and on the other hand, such meagre ripening of character, perfection of conduct, triumph of love, power to do good—is this my complaint? Then, I have forgotten the need of patience. Little by little, under smiling or threatening skies, working, waiting, living by faith—such are the conditions of the great life-processes of spiritual growth and fruitage.

THE FREEDOM OF SONSHIP

"If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."—*John viii.* 36.

Contextual reading, vv. 31-35.

I CAN think of no such perfect type of freedom as that of sonship when both father and son are all that their names connote. There is not a feather's weight of bondage to embarrass the relationship. There is law, order, authority, obedience inviolate; but the son does always what he loves and chooses to do, for his heart and will are one with the father's. Nor is it a mere transient relationship. The son cannot be sold or put away, but abides in the household.

Jesus has said that if He, the Son of God, make us free, we shall be free indeed. Why free indeed? Why is this the true and perfect freedom? Because the Son of God gives of that which is His own. Did He not say, "*My* peace I give unto you," and "That *my joy* might be in you"? So, likewise, He makes His disciples free in *His own* freedom, which is that of sonship to God.

How shall a sinful soul receive this spirit of

sonship from Jesus the Son of God—through faith? That one great word expresses it all. "I believe in Thee, trust myself to Thy sacrificial love, daily desire to know Thee near, take Thee as the very law of my life"—such is faith. Such is the open door to Him, and therefore to the spirit of sonship to God which his welcomed presence inspires. For in that presence and fellowship the power of sin is broken. Its fetters fall. A new aspiration takes the place of the old ambition. A new affection expels the old love of the world. A new liberty puts to shame the old self-indulgence. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature"—a new creation, in the freedom and power of a son of God.

I thank Thee, God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, for a nature that can be satisfied with nothing less than the perfect freedom of obedient filial love. Let me rest in that blissful centre of life. Let me choose to be governed from above, not from below. Let me be at home, more and more, in the true home of the soul, which is our Father's kingdom.

A TRUTH IN THE GRASS

"Who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food."—*Psa. cxlvii,* 8, 9.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

THE grass is a sign of the transient. In all literature, it seems to have been a chosen emblem of mortality. Losing its crown of beauty in a day, it is as "all flesh." But the grass also teaches the exactly opposite truth: it is a sign of immortality. Because it is God's provision of food for the beasts of the earth. Their hunger is proof that somehow and somewhere there is suitable food provided; for the Creator has not made their nature a tantalising deceit. Neither, we must believe, has He wrought tantalisation and deceit into the constitution of our human nature. Are we not much better than they?

What then is our necessary food? Not the grass: not bread alone. There is a spirit in man that hungers for knowledge and truth and righteousness. There is an instinctive longing for immortal life and love. There is need of that communion with the ever-living God in which is life eternal. Therefore this food of the spirit

must be. It is a deeper reality than the short-lived herbage of the earth. And such indeed has been the testimony of those who have hearkened to the voice of spiritual need, which is the voice of God Himself in the soul, from the beginning even until this good hour.

It has been fancifully suggested that if one's ears were keen and delicate enough, one might hear, in the still hours of the night, the growing of the grass. Certain it is that he that has ears to hear, may hear, in stillness of the spirit, the gentle and unobtrusive teaching of the grass. He may even hear therein the voice of the Creator, saying, "O soul that I made, rejoice and be glad, for I, the God of the field and forest, am much more thy God, and will not disappoint the deepest need of thy nature."

I bless Thee, Lord, for the lesson of the grass. Yes, I dare and must believe that Thou, who carest for the cattle on the mountains, according to their nature, wilt care for me according to mine. Thou who hast made the constitution of their being true, hast not made mine a falsity. I need Thee, O God; I cannot live as that which is essentially human in me requires, without communion with Thee who only hast immortality: therefore, I know that Thou art, and in Thee eternal life.

THE PAIN OF LOVE

"Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."—*Isa. liii.* 4.

Contextual reading, the Chapter.

Do the loving suffer? O idle question! In human experience, there is no such thing as a painless love. "I cannot leave you, father," says the child in a story-poem, "love hurts so." "Yes, darling," replies the father, as his little girl's life ebbs away, "it is too good not to hurt." In a world of vicissitude and death, can there be love without separation, which is as a sword to the soul? In a world of sorrow, can there be love without sympathy, which is *sorrowing with?* In a world of want and helplessness and peril, can there be love without self-sacrifice, which is making cost that in its very nature is attended with pain?

But selfishness, the unloving heart, the loveless life—is this, then, the path of peace? On the contrary, it is impoverishment and death. Let love depart, and the wellbeing is taken out of wealth, the heart out of labour, the joy out of joy. Love's pain is a notable sign of life—of a

life giving itself for the redemption of other lives, and thus under discipline that it may grow into greatness and be crowned with glory. God has made us so.

And hereby, we must believe, He is leading our thoughts upward to know something of His own nature, which passes knowledge. Here indeed is holy ground, the Holy of Holies, which may be approached only with reverent, trembling tread. But has not the veil been lifted by the Apostle and High Priest of our faith, even Jesus, who has shown us the glory of the Divine sacrificial love? And has not the mystery of suffering human love been thus interpreted to us? May we not better understand now the significance of fatherhood, and motherhood, and friendship, and the pure and good bearing with a broken heart the burdens of the unthankful and the evil? It is an image, poor and dim at best, of the Divine self-giving, which is from everlasting. It is the everyday parable of the love of God in Jesus Christ bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, of the Cross in eternal redemption. And if it be bringing us nearer to Him, so that we may some day see Him as He is—Amen! Amen! To Thee, O Lord God, be the dominion of the soul which Thou hast made, and the glory of its perfecting through pain.

TRUTH AND PEACE

"Therefore love truth and peace."—*Zech. viii.* 19.

Contextual reading, vv. 16-23.

EACH makes for the other. There can be no enduring peace, either within the soul itself or between man and man, in the absence of truth. Not in lies and hypocrisy, not in vanity and make-believe, can the soul repose. "First pure, then peaceable." Truth of character is the harmony of the will with the will of God, and harmony is peace. Truth of relationship with one's fellows is righteousness, goodwill, guilelessness, candour; and "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence forever."

The attempt to make peace either within one's self or with one's neighbour, at the expense of truth, is as if one should take the stones from the foundation of his house to build a wall for its protection. On the other hand, peace makes for truth. It is the quiet listening heart, the "heart of calm repose," that hears the voice of the Christ within. In the Palace Beautiful, the chamber of Peace in which Christian slept, "opened toward

the sun-rising." It is the tranquil mind that is open to the morning light of God's self-revelation.

He who answered the question, "Art thou a king, then?" with the assertion that He had come into the world as the Witness to the truth, said to those who had been learning of Him, "My peace I give unto you"—the peace of Him who was the King of truth. His coming was indeed a sign of conflict: He brought a sword upon earth. But it was conflict with error and evil for the establishment of the kingdom of peace. Let it go on in the world, and in each individual soul, till that kingdom shall come with power. Meanwhile let us also love that inward stillness which is the condition of increasing knowledge, that peace of God which is as an open window of the soul toward the sun-rising of His own word of revelation. Truth and peace—may they rule, as they must in every blessed life, with undisputed sway, each serving the other, both together sanctifying the soul. Thou God of truth and of peace, it is all in Thee, it is all through communion with Thy Spirit.

AS A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

"For who hath despised the day of small things?"—*Zech. iv.* 10.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-10.

It is certain that God has not despised it. The little children have long been singing of the drops of water and grains of sand that make the vast ocean and its far-reaching shores. But here comes the man of science to tell us that each separate drop of water, and each grain of sand, is as large in proportion to one of the atoms of matter of which it seems to be composed, as is the ocean or the shore in proportion to the single water-drop or sand-grain. So, at the physical heart of things, is the infinitely little, without which there could be no earth and no heavens. But God is there, and such is the method of His creation—the God of the atoms as truly as of the angels.

Zerubbabel had undertaken what seemed an impossible task. But there came to him this word of the Lord: "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." And it was so; but not through his own

strength: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts. . . . For who hath despised the day of small things?"

Such a time, with its commonplace circumstances, its false friends, its scornful passers-by, and no signs of glory as of the coming of the Son of Man in the sky, may be a very day of God, out of which He is going forth to build the Holy City upon earth.

In the year 1836, Theodor Fliedner, pastor in the village of Kaiserwerth on the Rhine, opened a parish hospital, with two volunteer nurses and a little rickety furniture, as a Deaconess Home. To-day that thought of an unpretentious good man's heart is represented by the modern Order of Deaconesses in the Christian churches of Europe and America. In the year 1844, twelve young men met together in a small room over a draper's warehouse in London, to form a society for the spiritual improvement of "young men engaged in the drapery and other trades." To-day it is the Young Men's Christian Association, with its wonderful organising and stategic power, and its half a million members.

Thou God of our common life, may we never grow disheartened at the prospects of any Christian work because its beginnings seem feeble and unpromising.

WHAT IS THY NAME?

"And thou shalt call his name John."—*Luke i.* 13.

Contextual reading, vv. 5-17.

An emigrant ship was wrecked on a foreign coast. The body of a little girl, among others, drifted ashore. When they laid it in the grave, and the question was asked, "What name?"—someone replied, "God knows." And so upon the gravestone was written that word, *God knows.* For there is no unknown grave, nor any unknown life, to Him.

In truth, must we not believe that God only can name any child? Because the true name must distinguish him who bears it from all others. It would not be a mere sign by which he might know himself spoken to, or be recognised by others when spoken of, but a sign of his individuality. For each human being has his own unique selfhood, and his own peculiar work to do in the world. There is good reason to believe that no two persons are made exactly alike, or called with exactly the same calling. God has made me *me* and not another, my mission *mine,* my life-plan *mine* only. Who knows it just as

it is? Not my neighbour, not any deepest-seeing prophet, not I myself. *God knows:* and therefore my true name is with Him only.

"Thou shalt call his name John"—which is, being interpreted, *to whom Jehovah is gracious.* For this child was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, made in greatness of character the peer of all who had gone before, sent upon the glorious career of heralding the approach of the Anointed of God. A child of grace—it was the interpretative name, given from Heaven, by which the preparer of the way of the Lord was to be called in this world, and a foretoken, perhaps, of the more significant name by which he shall be known in the world of light.

Our heavenly Father, Thou who hast given me my individual being and inalienable selfhood, and hast called me with my own calling in my own appointed life-path, I am glad that my name is with Thee. I hope to know it better as time goes on—and in æonian time hereafter. I shall make it really my own as I am true to Thine ideal and purpose, which is disclosed little by little to the listening spirit.

TO WHOM IS GOD GRACIOUS?

"For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison. . . .

"And straightway the king sent forth a soldier of his guard and commanded to bring his head; and he went and beheaded him in the prison."—*Mark vi.* 17, 27.

Contextual reading, vv. 14-29.

JOHN was laid hold of and bound in prison; *John* was abandoned to the mercy of a cruel and conscienceless woman; *John* was beheaded at what seemed the beginning of a great career. Is not this the man who, even before his birth, was named, by a sent-one from heaven, *to whom Jehovah is gracious?* It does not look so now. It looks as if he might have been named *victim* or *disappointment* or *broken column.*

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?
Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

Short-sighted and unlovely misgiving! Must we still be learning anew, each for himself, in each successive generation, the way of the Lord with His chosen ones? It is not that they shall

be safeguarded from evil men, that they shall be well spoken of and well treated by everybody, that they shall live out the full measure of their days and pass into the Glory beyond through a natural and painless death. That is not the Divine election. The outer ill may be the sign and means of an inner good. The martyr's death is not deplorable for him. No tears for the promoted disciple, the translated witness-bearer, the crowned victor. His last service may be, fittingly, the best of all. "This He spake signifying by what manner of *death* he should glorify God."

Far be it from me, Lord, to pray for a violent or an untimely death. Rather would I ask that the days may glide serenely on, till the work that I have planned in Thy name shall be completed, and that as life had its morning of bright foretokenings and of "long, long thoughts," so it may have an evening of sweet memories, and end amid the scenes I hold most sacred, in outward and inward peace. But all as Thou wilt, my God and Father. I do not wish to know what shall be on the morrow. *The Lord is gracious*—if Thou canst call me by that name, according to Thy gift and purpose, not indeed in some greater life, but even in mine, may all Thy perfect will be done.

THE DEAFNESS OF PRIDE

"Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud; for Jehovah hath spoken."—*Jer. xiii.* 15.

Contextual reading, vv. 8-17.

THERE are pupils, not destitute of natural capacity or energy, of whom the teacher may be tempted to say, "I can teach them nothing, and my labour is in vain." It is because they seem to themselves to know already, or not to need guidance. They have no outward and upward look toward the teacher, but a habitual self-congratulatory gaze at their own minds. It appears in their facial expression, their bearing, their tones of voice: and they cannot hear instruction, or submit to be advised or directed, because pride has stopped their ears. On the other hand, the best students are fain to hang upon the teacher's word, as if fearing that some little syllable may escape them.

Scholarship, wisdom, knowledge, genius, is childlike. It wonders and inquires. But the self-sufficient will spend a whole morning in the company of the learned and experienced, only to grudge them the opportunity to open their

mouths—so highly do they esteem the multitude of their own words.

Similarly when God Himself speaks the proud will not hear. They are self-listening. They are self-absorbed. They are taking counsel not of Him, but of their own fancied gifts or acquisitions or goodness. God by His Spirit shows what is the blessed life: they are so engrossed in their own views and plans as not to see the heavenly vision. God rebukes their lack of worship and service—"Will a man rob God?" They are ready to defend their conduct —"Wherein have we robbed Thee?" God sends them the gracious message of eternal life through willingly receiving all from Him: they are secretly too boastful of their own moral standing to welcome His messengers.

And now is it my own spirit and fault that I have been describing? Surely, Lord, there is no more subtle enemy of the knowledge of Thy ways than the sin of pride. It steals into one's holiest hours and aspirations. It changes its forms, disguising its features so as even to look like humility, persisting, that it may corrupt the best and thus make it the worst. Save me from glorying, secretly or openly, directly or indirectly, in myself. The meek wilt Thou teach Thy way.

ASPIRATION AND SELF-INDULGENCE

"Would that we had died by the hand of Jehovah in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger."—*Ex. xvi.* 3.

Contextual reading, Chap. xiv. 10-14.

It was no unworthy name by which Joseph's brothers called him in scorn, when they said to one another, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." Bright and high are the ideals of a stainless boyhood—as it ought to be. Listening to some strong and captivating discourse, which falls as if spontaneously in words of fire from the speaker's lips, the youth says to himself, "I, too, will be an orator—and without that one's limitations." Or, in other circumstances, "I will be a successful man of affairs"; or, "I will have such a sweet and perfect home as none that I have ever seen." Why should the realisation, in most instances, fall so far below the ideal? It is because of the flesh-pots of Egypt. When the aspiring beginner in the actual field of achievement finds that the heights at which he aims can be reached only by straitened or even

craggy pathways of self-denial and humble patient toil, he is tempted to forsake them for the lower levels of life. The present, which should be the servant, makes itself the antagonist of the future. The gratification of a moment is permitted to outweigh the peace of a lifetime. The love of ease casts its enervating spell over the spirit of enterprise. Self-indulgence clips the wings of aspiration and leaves it floundering in the dust.

The people of Israel were stirred with the dream of freedom and the Land of Promise. But when it came to paying the price of freedom with poverty, and hunger, and the sword, and the lack of the old customary comforts, they faltered, and were ready to return to the full-fed animalism of their past.

There is one ideal to which all others must reverently acknowledge subjection—with which if any other interfere, it is thereby self-condemned. The conscience within us declares, It is the ideal of personal goodness. And its sworn enemy is self-indulgence. Not happiness, not joy: these are its fellow-helpers. But the unregulated desires of the flesh and the mind. Let them not have dominion over us, O Christ, Thou holy and almighty Friend. Give us Thine own strength against them.

AN IMPOSSIBLE FAITH

"All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against anyone; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."—*Mark xi.* 24, 25.

Contextual reading, vv. 20-23.

SUPPOSE that, in an unforgiving spirit toward anyone, I ask my Father who is in heaven to forgive me my trespasses, and believe that I do receive forgiveness: have I received it indeed? It is an impossible case. I cannot believe in God's forgiveness of me, so long as I refuse to forgive my brother. For faith is no mere conception of the imagination or conviction of the reason. It is not of the intellect. It is trusting: it is opening the heart God-ward. But the heart that is pervaded by a spirit of unforgiveness is making no room for the Divine forgiveness. It is preoccupied. The door is shut against all spirit of forgiveness, whether from man or from God. It cannot say, Come in, Thou forgiving God, make me clean with Thy forgiveness, and take possession of that which is Thine own.

Is it not hard to forgive? Very hard, sometimes; but who has promised that to be a disciple of Jesus, living the life of a son of God, is to drift easily along with the wind and tide of one's own inclinations. Let me not be quick to take offence, but considerate, charitable, broadminded. Let me not magnify an apparent slight into an actual affront. But am I really wronged? Then the blow may hurt, if it will. But I must be ready to make any excuse possible for him who inflicted it—as I should wish him to do in case of my own wrong-doing. And let me remember that mere indifference is not forgiveness. "I would do him no harm"—that is well. But it is not sufficient; for in addition I must give him a place in my prayers. I must sincerely seek his good in the presence of the Maker and Judge of us both; and if so, I shall be ready to do him good, and to seek him thus with my forgiveness—as my hope is that the heavenly Father will seek me with His forgiveness.

My God and Father, I cannot cast my brother out of my heart, and have Thee enter or remain within. Thou wilt abide there with him, and only so. I yield, I give up the evil spirit—"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

GOD'S WILL AS KNOWN

"Teach me to do Thy will."—*Psa. cxliii.* 10.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-10.

But let us never forget, O Lord, that Thou hast already taught us Thy will, even ever of old. Thou hast abundantly shown us how to walk so as to please Thee. I open Thy Book of eternal life and of everyday guidance, and listen to its teaching: "Rejoice alway, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward." Hast Thou not here given a law for the spirit of our lives? "Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine"—whose words? The words of Thine own Son, who was the Light of the world, revealing Thy will. And they have not ceased to be spoken, through these printed leaves from without, and by the interpreting Spirit within. Where then is one who can rise up and say, "Most willingly would I do the right and the good, if only it were made known?" From the days of thy fathers, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

I crave the obedient will. May the duty known be the duty done. May the opportunity offered be the opportunity embraced. May Thy word, Thou Teacher of men, be a lamp not simply to my eyes, but also and always to my feet. It is not a question of what has been taught me, but of what I have done. Here is the life-centre—to will to do Thy will. About it the light of Christ will gather, from it the delusions of self-worship will steal away. "If any man willeth to do His Will, he shall know of the teaching."

> "All round about our feet shall shine
> A light like that the Wise Men saw,
> If we our willing hearts incline
> To that sweet Life which is the Law."

But these words that I am uttering—O God, are they indeed my prayer? Come they really from the heart? I shrink from words, I fear a fatal facility in the use of devotional language. Better silence before Thee than words that are words only. With the devout physician, every experimental inquiry into disease is a prayer for the healer's skill; with the devout student, every book that he opens is a prayer for knowledge. With every Christian, the doing of Thy will is a prayer to be taught Thy will.

THE CAST-OFF CROWNS

"And shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power."—*Rev. iv.* 10, 11.

Contextual reading, vv. 4-11.

Is it a strange thing to do—to discrown one's self? Might we rather expect the song of the redeemed, sitting still on their bright thrones, to be, We are worthy, our own right arm has won us the victory and gained us the glory? That could not be the life-song of heaven—of creatures in the realised presence of their Creator, of saints in the holy light of the sanctifying Spirit, of victors through the blood of the Lamb and the word of His testimony. Divinely fitting seem the cast-off crowns before the Throne.

Here is a noble-minded mother. The guardian angel of his earliest years, she has lived even till now for her child. She instilled into his mind, through the teaching of her lips and the power of her personality, the principles of right conduct in the Master's name. In his behalf, no self-denial has been too severe, no sacrifice other than a joy. His whole equipment for life came

through her wise choices and patient, self-forgetting love. Whatever a Christian mother may be to a son, that has this woman been to the son whom God gave her. And now when his name has become known in the world, and he is crowned with the honours of the great and good, does he glory in them in her presence? No, no, he glories in her. The thought of her is the sweetest element in all that he has gained from the world. He is still a little child before his mother, and there lies his bright crown at her feet. It is a poor and unworthy figure of the coronation of the sons of God.

To be received into the glory of their Lord, that will be all in all to the redeemed from earth. Tell me of being crowned, and I cannot repress the question, Crowned for what? Through no achievement of mine could I ever be called victor. Only one hand could ever put a crown upon my head—the hand of infinite forgiving Love. But tell me that somehow and sometime, through that love unknown, I may look upon His face in peace, and I shall ask no more.

MY OWN BURDEN

"For each man shall bear his own burden."—*Gal. vi.* 5.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-10.

"His own burden" of pain is each man's to bear for himself. A brother's help may make it lighter but cannot wholly remove it. Has not God shown that such is His wisdom and His way in perfecting the faith of His children? Sometimes the wish is expressed for a dearly loved friend, "May you never know sorrow! May your path be strewn all along with thornless flowers!" Such good wishes are really hurtful wishes. Whoever has had a friend that would be really benefited by the entire absence of that Divinely appointed trial that comes through suffering?

"His own burden"—let him bear it himself without imposing it unduly upon the sympathies of other people. The cry of the child slightly hurt in play is oftener an appeal for sympathy than a cry of pain. The child likes to show its wounds—taking the bandage off, that others may see the little scratch or bruise on the flesh. Let us not be needlessly showing the sores of the

soul or evermore craving sympathy in the common ills of life.

"His own burden," which God has providentially put upon him—let him bear that, and not borrow from the future a burden that need not be borne. The evil that we dread may never enter our life. If it should, we shall not have to meet it alone.

> "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee:
> Thou hast holden my right hand.
> Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel,
> And afterward receive me to glory."

Shall we then attempt to crowd into the brief space of the passing day the possible ills of the coming years? Shall we distrust the Saviour's word and dishonour His name by cherishing anxiety for the morrow? "The day hath ynough with his own griefe."

My *own* burden—may the touch of Thy hand, Thou almighty Burden-bearer of the soul, make me strong to bear that which Thou hast laid upon me, with fidelity and praise.

WHAT IS WORTH WHILE

"Except Jehovah build the house,
They labour in vain that build it;
Except Jehovah keep the city,
The watchman waketh but in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To take rest late,
To eat the bread of toil;
For so He giveth unto His beloved sleep [*margin,* in sleep].

—*Psa. cxxvii.* 1, 2.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

THE meaning cannot be that the builder's or the watchman's or the bread-winner's task is useless. For these, and the like of them, are all a part of God's own work in the world through human hands. Should men refuse to be employed in doing such work, it must remain undone, and there would be fatal lack of houses and safety and bread. "If any will not work, neither let him eat."

But left to themselves, human hands can do simply and absolutely nothing. Who could lay the first stone of his house's foundation, if the hand of God, wielding the attraction of gravitation and all "natural" forces, were not building

conjointly with him? What nightly watchman at his post could keep the city, if God should no longer supply strength and intelligence to its defenders, or in any way restrain the mad brute passions of its enemies? What farmer—the man to whom the whole world looks for its food—ever *grew* a crop or *made* a harvest? It was the Son of God who said, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." Without the eternal and creative Divine Worker, men's best undertakings and endeavours would be but busy idleness. Nay, rather, there would be no human life.

Therefore, it is vain for anyone to go about his work as if it were in the most real sense in his own hands. And it is more than worth while to have faith in God, trusting all things to Him.

Surely it is fitting that we should begin each day with some morning hymn; for behold, what He is ever giving between the days, in the still hours of sleep—

> "Over tired eyes His hand He lays,
> And strength and hope and life renews."

It is as if in the evening God laid His hand upon us, saying "Cease now from all striving, and yield yourself in heart and brain and soul back to me, the Source of your being, that I may renew the life I have given."

THE INSIGHT OF LOVE

"Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end."—*John xiii.* 1.

Contextual reading, vv. 2-7.

It might be well if the name *lover* could have retained in our English tongue its broader and early meaning of *anyone who loves.* It would be the highest title possible to be borne—so high, indeed, that it could seldom have been borne without abuse.

But there can be no doubt of the simple truth and reality of Jesus' love to men. With heart and will and with all the strength of the stainless and holy soul, he *loved* them. It was distinctly shown in His relations to the Twelve and to others who need not have hesitated to claim Him as their personal friend. And what manner of men were they? Who were these persons whom the Man whose soul was incapable of a low or petty thought, who was of too pure eyes to look upon sin, whose constant aim was to do the will of His Father, chose as His companions and loved unfalteringly unto the end? We can

never know how much there must have been in them to wound Him—how much at which the mind and heart of the Righteous One must have been offended. Yet He loved them, He was glad of their presence, He would have them with Him in the daily round of life, He would not be far separated from them even in the Garden of Sorrow.

Did Jesus then love that which is essentially unlovely? It could not be. But Jesus had the insight to see what is of real worth and excellence amid much that was unlovely, repulsive and sinful. He saw the divine humanity in men. Whatever there was of the image of God in anyone, whatever potentiality of goodness—to that the heart of the Son of Man was drawn, and there He rested in His love. He discerned that which ought to be, and might be, as well as that which actually was.

Have I so learned Christ? Then I shall be slow to complain of the lack of what might be called interesting associates, or refined surroundings, or cultured society. I shall find humanity precious. I shall discern the true heart beneath the coarse clothing, the pulsations of love amid encrusting selfishness, the possibility of good in the evil mind. Passion is blind, but love can see through great darkness.

HEARTSEASE

"To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."

—*Luke i.* 79.

Contextual reading, vv. 67-79.

THE universal unrest is shown every hour and everywhere—in greed, in fretfulness, in profanity, in the attempt to make life a pleasure-ground, in grasping ambition. Who will guide our feet into the way of peace?

Well may peace be spoken of as a "way" along which one is making a journey. For the essence of peace is not inaction. It is far from being a state of having nothing to do. It is harmony with the law of one's being. Whether the law command to sit still or to go forward, to rest or to labour, in obedience is peace. There may be peaceful motion: there may be unrestful rest. The broad, deep river gliding softly down its course without let or hindrance, suggests a truer idea of peace than does the dull and stagnant pool, whose waters cannot find the outlet which their nature demands. The bird which loves to soar as well as to sing, borne at will through the

wide realm of air, is more at rest than his captive fellow that pines in the cage for the freedom and flight for which he was made. There is no lovelier picture of peace than a sleeping child: but confine the same child when wide awake, every nerve tingling with life and craving activity, to a chair or a couch—it will be painfully ill at ease. So we learn that peace is found in right relations to the laws of God in our being. Is it submission? Undoubtedly, it is putting ourselves under the authority of the eternally right and good. Is it humility? No doubt the poorly clad shepherd boy in the Valley of Humiliation "wears more of that herb called heartsease in his bosom than he that is clad in silk and velvet." For humility is the recognition of one's true place, with the consequent reverence for that which is above, and of obedience to the vision of the highest.

But who shall show the way of peace? The Dayspring from on high, the unerring Guide of the soul, He whose feet knew no other path. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." "That in me ye may have peace."

HOW TO HEAR

"Take heed, therefore, how ye hear."—*Luke viii.* 18.

Contextual reading, vv. 9-19.

How then shall we hear? As Jesus Himself has shown the way, it may be represented by the one word *obedience.* Certainly all other good qualities of the listener—attentiveness, prayerfulness, docility, eagerness—culminate and reach their final expression in *the doing of the truth.* "If ye know these things, blessed are ye, if ye do them." The good ground is that which bears fruit, many fold.

And here as elsewhere the law of increase through possession is illustrated. Moral truth is not really possessed till it is *done.* It only lies on the surface of the mind, not ingrained, not wrought into the life. The man may think that he has it, but in any deeply real sense he has it not; and even the slight hold with which he does take possession of it, will relax. "From him shall be taken away even that which he thinketh he has." But the man who does the truth will not only make it a real and permanent possession, but will at the same time enlarge his

capacity for truth, and so will have more of it to know and to do. "To him shall be given."

Suppose that before this evening's sun shall sink to rest we should be called into the other life: with what treasure of moral truth should we enter there? Not with the amount that we have heard, but with that only which has been wrought into the immortal texture of character by obedience.

Thou, Lord, hast not withheld from me the vision of Thy truth. Nor has it ever come unaccompanied with an imperative. Always it gives me something to do. Have I been disobedient unto the heavenly vision? If so, no wonder if it have lost its power and dimmed away. Great are my opportunities to learn. Books and living teachers are all about me. But what avails that I should read such and such books, even the books of Holy Scripture, or hear such and such sermons? What though I have sat under the ministry of the greatest preachers of the age, and can name their names and speak admiringly of their messages? It is not the hearer, but the doer, that really has the truth and knows the will of God. And such possessions are ever increasing, such knowledge shines more and more unto the perfect day.

THE SERVING KING

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God, riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments; and He took a towel and girded Himself. Then He poureth water into the bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet."—*John xiii.* 3-5.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-17.

Does it mean that although Jesus was conscious that He came forth from God and was going unto God, yet He girded Himself with a towel to wash the disciples' feet? Or is the meaning, *Because* of this consciousness He did so? I think, the latter. For the whole Bible, the whole record of the growing Divine self-revelation, has taught that it is Godlike to minister.

> "He healeth the broken in heart,
> He bindeth up all their wounds.
> He telleth the number of the stars,
> He giveth them all their names."

Have you seen the nurse dressing the wounds of her patient? He that rules the heavens—sending forth worlds innumerable in their awful

paths through trackless abysms of space—binds up the wounds of the sorrowful on earth.

There is one figure, it would seem, that in all ages is without a rival for setting forth the most comforting ministration of love. It is not that of the friend, nor of the sister, nor of the father: it is that of motherhood. The arms of the mother about the hurt child—not only in his infancy, but later and later in life—her kind words, and ready sympathy, and warm affection, and tenderly brooding human presence, is the best picture that has yet been drawn of consolation in trouble and sorrow. But a prophet of Israel, "Isaiah, is very bold, and saith," this word of Jehovah: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

Therefore, Jesus, the Revealer, making Him known as it had never been done before, came "not to be ministered unto but to minister." Girt round with glory and power in the holy city, while the nations came from afar to receive the Law at his mouth? No. His ideal humanity was shown when, in the full consciousness of whence He came and whither He went and who He was, He bent over the disciples' feet, and wiped them with the towel wherewith He had girded Himself. And His throne, it was the Cross.

JESUS OUR KING

"And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a great rock in a weary land."—*Isa. xxxii. 2.*

Contextual reading, vv. 1-17.

WHAT would be thought of a king who, together with the brain of a great ruler, should have the heart of a servant? One whose most familiar thought was not, How grand I am! but, What can I do for the people? A servant, even a father and a brother to the least and lowest person in all his realm. Imperial in intellect and authority, yet his heart burdened with real love toward the men and women and children over whom he had been appointed to reign. Would not that be a true-born king?

The founder of the Hebrew monarchy laid hold upon one high royal trait, and set it forth "in beauty's light ineffable" in his last inspired psalm:

"One that ruleth over men righteously,
That ruleth in the fear of God,
He shall be as the light of the morning, when
the sun riseth,

A morning without clouds,
When the tender grass springeth out of the earth,
Through clear shining after rain."

But what next?

"Verily my house is not so before God."

The ideal had not been realised in his own reign.

It was a still more glorious king that arose in the vision of prophecy: that of a man who should be at once the Defence and the Consolation of his people—a "hiding-place" and "rivers of water," a "covert from the tempest" and the "shade of a great rock in a weary land." But neither was this prophecy fulfilled in any successor upon the throne of David. In most cases, it was very far otherwise. The king, weak or wicked, or both weak and wicked, sought his own pleasure, not the people's welfare.

But in the fulness of time the ideal became a Fact. Far greater than the prophet's tenderest or sublimest thought, Jesus our King was born in Bethlehem and died outside the gates of the holy city on the Cross of Sacrifice. Lord of the soul, His life was one ceaseless ministration of kindness and mercy.

THE PROSPERITY OF LOVE

"They shall prosper that love thee."—*Psa. cxxii.* 6.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

TRULY it will be so. It cannot be otherwise than that those who sincerely love the City of God, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in any era or period of its history, will prosper. Not always, it is true, with outward prosperity—enjoying perfect health, or becoming rich and increased in goods so as to have need of nothing. This may or may not be. But with inward prosperity—having the very kingdom of heaven in their hearts. This must be. Because, for one thing, the lover of the Church will attend upon its ordinances; and these are means of grace whereby one shall grow in the grace and knowledge of God. Then, too, the lover of the Church will be a worker in its cause; and according to an immutable law of the spiritual life, whatever one does for others he does unto himself—deepening his own spirituality, enriching his own spirit.

But chiefly, the very love itself is prosperity. In truth, what can be better? No deeper anathema than to be cursed with an unfeeling heart,

no richer benediction than to love with a Christ-like devotion. For God, as revealed in the cross of His Son, is love; and to be like Him, perfect in the heavenly Father's perfection, is the all of life.

I see a mother continually serving her son. In his infancy, boyhood, youth, early manhood, with untiring self-sacrifice she ministers to his needs. I approach her and say: "You are doing a great deal for your boy, but of course you expect to get it back again. It is an investment for your own old age, when he shall supply you with the comforts and luxuries of life. I see your motive, and understand it all." I could hardly misapprehend or wound a mother's heart more effectually. Love is in itself joy, riches, motive, ineffable satisfaction. Love is its own reward.

Lord Jesus, I ask no outward prosperity for any service to Thy cause that I may ever have offered or attempted. I ask no pay for loving Thee. Unworthy to be numbered even with Thy hired servants, still I would not have the spirit of a hireling. Love will make the very doing of Thy will wealth and blessedness. If henceforth Thou couldst call me not bondservant but friend!

CONTINUOUS CONVERSION

"Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."—*II Cor. iv.* 16.

Contextual reading, vv. 7-18.

PAUL does not say: "My inward man was renewed twenty-one years ago in the city of Damascus; then and there was I arrested in a life of ignorance and unbelief, and made a new creation in Christ Jesus." That, indeed, was an experience never to be forgotten or disparaged; and he tells it, with tongue and pen, again and again. But not here. It is another and greater aspect of the truth that he is emphasising now. It is the perpetual cleansing and upbuilding of the soul. It is the daily inflow of the life of God. Only this could keep even the chief of Apostles a Christian. Without this, the inward no less than the outward man must decline and decay.

Let me never imagine or practically take for granted that it will suffice that I was truly converted twenty-one years ago. Think of a tree concerning which the owner should have little or nothing to say except, On such a day it was planted. If it be a healthy and fruitful tree

to-day, that is enough. If it be diseased, or worthless, or in decline, what avails that it started well or was once undoubtedly alive?

"Day by day." Indeed, it is thus that even the outward man is kept in life. The stone is fixed. The block of marble knows no such process as waste and repair, and accordingly is substantially the same now as a thousand years ago. But it is not so with any living thing. The tissues of plant, or animal, or human body, are breaking down and building up moment by moment. Nevertheless very plain is the difference between the outward and the inward man. The outward is for a little space of time, and then, with the cessation of renewal, must cease to be; the inward is for the timeless sphere. Here the renewal never ceases. "He is sinking now," said the physician at the bedside of a dying Christian man. "No, doctor, I am rising," was the whispered response.

"Day by day." No day without some thought upon the deeper things of life, without aspiration, without prayer, without the bread of truth, without work in the Master's name. Quicken me, Lord, through Thine own appointed means, according to Thy word.

THE JOY OF OBEDIENCE

"I will run the way of Thy commandments,
When Thou shalt enlarge my heart."
—*Psa. cxix.* 32.

Contextual reading, II Cor. 5.

It is more difficult to live the life of a civilised man—meeting the ceaseless obligations of home, business, society, civil government—than to waste one's days in animalism, like the savage. Nevertheless, the civilised man experiences a satisfaction the savage knows nothing of, and would by no means exchange places with his humbler brother of the woods.

An unconverted friend asks, "Do you really enjoy the Christian life?" That is as if one were to say, Do you really enjoy the life of a learner? would you not rather live in ignorance, never investigating a question, or reading a book, or even undergoing the tedium of learning the alphabet? Or, as if one were to say, Do you enjoy a life of cleanliness and industry? would you not rather live in untidiness and sloth? Or, Do you enjoy friendship and neighbourliness? would you not rather simply live for yourself?

It is a sorry sort of man that, in such instances, fails to prefer the more difficult life. We do not sit down and count the pleasures that must be foregone, and set over against them the pleasures that may be enjoyed, in the higher mode of living. It is enough to know that it is the higher, that it is more nearly what we were made for, that as such it must be both the nobler and the happier.

So with the very highest life of all, which only is life indeed—that of a son of God doing His Father's will. Truly, here is no course of self-indulgence. Here is self-denial, conflict, strenuous endeavour, obedience. But why not? It is suitable to our moral nature. It calls forth our highest powers and possibilities. It unseals, accordingly, the deepest founts of joy. It is the blessed life.

Moreover, love is strangely daring and swift-footed. "I will protect you," says timidity itself, love-inspired, and strikes its blow in the very face of death. "I will go," says indolence itself, love-inspired, and hastens on winged feet to seek help for the needy or endangered. In like manner, as God's servants become large-hearted in His service, obedience takes no account of difficulties, but duties are done with the swiftness of joy.

THE WILL TO HEAR

"I will hear what God Jehovah will speak."—*Psa. lxxxv.* 8.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

OFTEN have I besought Thee, Lord, to hear while I speak. But another prayer rises in my heart to-day: it is the desire, the determination, the prayer that I may hear when Thou speakest. For Thou art the eternally self-revealing God. Thou art ever speaking, in divers tones and forms of utterance, to the souls which Thou hast made. As the swift course of the sun, so are Thy words unto the ends of the earth. The beauty and wonderfulness of the world, the outgoings of the morning and evening, the whispering leaves, the dome of heaven, the unsounded depths and the unattainable heights, are ever making their appeal to the soul: and it is Thine appeal. The events and experiences of life, joyous or sad, familiar or rare—of other lives and of my own —are full-fraught with instruction: and the teaching is Thine. The strange undefined yearnings of the soul, which seem to come out of the infinite and lose themselves in the infinite again,

in "thinking of the days that are no more," or at any even the most unexpected time, not in answer to any call of ours—are they not the soul's answer to Thy touch, Thou infinite God?

Here before me now is Thy full-volumed speech in the Scriptures which Thou hast inspired—and above all, from the lips and life of Him through whom in these last days Thou hast spoken, even Thy Son; and speaking within—shall I not dare confess it?—the very Spirit of truth, the infallible interpreter of whatsoever Thou dost speak from without.

Do Thou waken me to hear, as a disciple, morning by morning. It may be that I fear to receive some word of Thine, lest it expose a secret sin, or lay an unwelcome duty upon the conscience. May it not be so. Whensoever Thou speakest, whether it be to wound or to heal, to command or to promise, if so be it is indeed a word of Thine, may I receive it willingly. Quicken me, Lord, to recognise Thy voice, and to obey, my conscience bearing witness in the Holy Spirit. Then shall I hear the very words of life, when Thou shalt give me the listening and obedient heart.

THE CALL INTO DARKNESS

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." —*Heb. xi.* 8.

Contexual reading, vv. 1-22.

In fact, all human life is a going forth into an unknown futurity. A child is born: how long will he live, and where, and how, and with what achievements or failures? Only by the Eye to which the end shows clear as the beginning is that vision seen. A young man enters upon his occupation. It is with bright hopes of success—it ought to be. But whether his ship will be wrecked, or in what plight it will make the harbour, he can no more certainly determine than can any sailor on any seas. A bridal couple stand before the altar: it is a new and untried sphere which they dare to enter.

But that which is true of the starting point and of the chief turning points of life, is true of all its circumstances and situations. They are changing continually in unanticipated ways. What next? To what scene will I be introduced by the next step of the journey? A day hence,

an hour, a moment—what will be its experience of joy, of pain, of difficulty, of duty? Lord of our life, Guide of the soul, Thou knowest.

Abraham was an emigrant. He went from his home in Haran, and with little or no knowledge of the country toward which his footsteps were turned. But so have emigrants innumerable gone forth, East and West, in ancient and in modern times. And so do we all in our continuous emigration into the unexplored future. Where then was Abraham's peculiarity? what did he more than others? Or, to bring the question home to ourselves, where is the peculiarity and the distinction of every man of faith to-day?

It is in the Call that he hears and obeys. He asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He accepts his occupation as a vocation, his life-path as a plan of God. He will take this direction or that, do this work or that, remain quietly where he is or put the solid globe between himself and the old home, according to his interpretation of the mind and will of God in his life.

"And I, where'er He went, would go,
Nor question where the path might lead,
Enough to know that here below
I walked with God, indeed."

LIFE IN DEATH

"As dying, and behold, we live."—*II Cor. vi.* 9.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-10.

PAUL was continually dying. His burdens and exposures were such as flesh and blood could not long endure. We must think of him as prematurely old, with shattered nerves and aching limbs and defective eyesight—unable to write with his own hand the letters he would send to the churches. But behold, he was all alive. Never so much alive as now. "Such a one as Paul the aged" is younger in spirit than Saul the persecuting Pharisee or the newly converted Christian. The true self, going on from strength to strength, knows nothing of decadence or death.

Greatly to be desired is health of body. Sickness, disease, anæmia, is an evil, not a good. The colourless cheek or sunken eye is no mark of sainthood. It is rather a mark of some habitual violation of the laws of God in the body. In a great cathedral I have seen a statue of the avenging angel, with a drawn sword, and the inscription, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." But that majestic pile was

not the sort of temple that the author of these solemn words had in mind. He was speaking of a far more marvellous structure, even the temple of the body, which enshrines the soul that is itself the shrine of the Divine Presence. Its honour is indeed guarded by the rewards and penalties of the Law which has come forth from the mouth of God.

Yet there is no care or good use that can prevent the body's perishing, whereas the inward man is renewed day by day. So the body does not constitute, but imperfectly represents the real self. We are spirit, not flesh. In the midst of death, therefore, we are in life. "You cannot touch *me*," said the unvanquished martyr to the consuming flames. More alive than ever is the discarnate spirit, even as the *psyche* lives a larger life than the grub.

But it was life indeed, and not mere continued existence, that the triumphant Apostle meant when he said, "Behold, we live." How shall it be gained? Thou God of the living, it is found only in communion with Thee. It is renewed through waiting upon Thee. "He that liveth and *believeth in me* shall never die."

HOW TO ABOUND

"I know also how to abound."—*Phil. iv.* 12.

Contextual reading, vv. 10-20.

To *abound?* O great-hearted follower of Him who, though He was rich, became poor for others' enrichment! In bonds, possessing nothing, to have received the gifts brought by Epaphroditus from Philippi—some good food or warm clothing —that was to "have all and abound." That was to thee abundance, wealth.

Shall we of the present day, in the ordinary circumstances of life, make an inventory of our possessions? Conveniences; comforts; adornments; ministrations to the senses, to the tastes, to the imagination, to the social sensibilities, to the heart and spirit—they can in no wise be numbered or measured. If the Apostle to the Gentiles, a Roman citizen, a man of knowledge and culture, a most courteous Christian gentleman, when in prison and destitute of almost everything that makes life outwardly pleasant and good, had "all" *in abundance,* what shall be said of our riches? Alas, for the blind eyes that will not see them! Shame upon the dumb lips

that will not speak of them cheerfully to men or gratefully to God, but contrariwise are prone to complain of hardships and poverty!

Outward abundance may tend to inward dearth and death. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Therefore is it of the utmost importance to learn what this noble-minded prisoner of the Lord in Rome learned, in the experiences of life, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ—to learn *how to abound.* It is a more difficult lesson than how to suffer want. Not, indeed, difficult, theoretically. We know the doctrine. It has been made clear as noonday that all our powers, acquisitions, possessions, within and without, are a trust from God's hand, and that the Christian way to abound is to use and manage them in His name. But the doing of it!

Help us, Thou Infinite Giver, daily to restore to Thee Thine own. And that will be to multiply wealth indeed, even unto eternal abundance. That will be to transmute gold into Christlike character, and thus to lay up treasure in heaven.

THE LIFE THAT ENDURES

"So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle."—*Psa. ciii.* 5.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

Even the schoolboy, to whom the idea of death is so strange and unreal, is attracted by the story of the Spanish adventurers who went in search of the Fountain of Youth, but discovered only the land of Florida, whose flowers faded, and whose people died, like all others. Yet vain as any dream of the night is the daydream of immortal flesh and blood. Old age comes to the man as inevitably as growth and maturity to the child, and it is no less natural to die than to be born.

Nevertheless there is such a thing as "a green old age." There are young old people. Whatever marks of time the ruthless years may have left upon their faces, their hearts, unwrinkled still, pulsate with "more life and fuller" and deeper than in the heyday of youth. They are peaceful, buoyant, hopeful, interested in others' welfare, sweet and fruitful with love to God and their fellows. Alas, that all should not be so! But some are old indeed—worn in spirit, disappointed, fretful, dissatisfied, captious. "How

old art thou?" asked Pharaoh of Jacob. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." It was not a bright testimony. "How old are you?" I heard it asked of a glad-hearted, sweet-spirited Christian man. "Fifty-four years *young*," was the reply. "I am often saluted as old," said Newman Hall on his eightieth birthday, "but I do not feel old. Age weakens only capacity for playthings of childhood. The more abiding bounties and beauties cause fuller joy with increasing experience. Poetry, science, mountains, flowers, the human face divine, radiant with devotion to God and affection to men, the Gospel studied and preached, the high purpose of seeking and saving the lost, Christian intercourse, home bliss, communion with God, the Blessed Hope nearing and brightening—age can experience in these truer joys than are possible for youth."

Is not perpetual youthfulness a matter of temperament? Partly so; partly a result of that good gift of God, an instinctive disposition to look upon the bright side of things. But more truly and deeply a matter of personal religion. For sin, being a violation of God's law, naturally tends to injure, enfeeble, destroy. Goodness, being harmony with God's law, even His law of eternal love, is strength and peace and life and joy.

THE GIVING OF A LIFE

"Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, them that are ill-treated as being yourselves also in the body."—*Heb. xiii.* 3.

Contextual reading, vv. 1, 2, 15, 16.

SUPPOSE that one's friend, though true and gifted and great-hearted, should be unable to make him many presents: would he be willingly exchanged for another, who had less love but more money? Suppose that one's own father, revered, trusted, delighted in, should have no wealth to bequeath: would the memory of him ever cease to be sacred and dear? There is nothing on earth so rich and powerful as personality. There is nothing that may be so much to us as a person. Weigh the worth of human companionship, the value of a friend—against what? You have wrought a service for one whom you deeply love; and he offers a sum of money, saying, "You have done your duty, take this and go be happy." It was himself you wanted. The offer of pay and dismissal is worse than an offence.

If therefore I would fain become a beneficent

force, a joybringer, in another's life, it lies within my power. It lies within my power, whatever the outward poverty, because I can give him of myself. Here is the respect in which every man is rich: he possesses the incalculable wealth of personality, and need never complain, "I have nothing to give."

And the way of entrance into the life we would win or bless, is *sympathy*. One can touch the heart of little children only through the child-heart in himself, the heart of young men only through a genuine fellowfeeling with the pleasures and ideals of their life, the heart of the suffering only through sympathetic suffering. It is a mutual life-sharing. One takes of another's and gives of his own. Very beautiful is the symbol of it in certain city slums of our day—the Settlement Home. This is your life, says the refined and loving-hearted slum-sister, I will make it mine, and will share mine with you. "As bound with them."

Where then shall it be learned—this strangely sweet and unselfish wisdom? Nowhere so truly as in the life-sharing of the Son of God. "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner took part of the same."

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

"More than conquerors."—*Rom. viii.* 37.

Contextual reading, vv. 35-39.

MAY a warrior become more than a conqueror? Aye, much more. In truth, there is no such thing in Christian warfare as bare conquest. For through the overcoming of hindrances and antagonisms, there is realisation of increasing personal power. Through the conquest of spiritual enemies, there comes enlargement of the resources of the soul, which is the richest fruit of victory. Tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—can any of these, or all conjoined, separate us from the love of Christ? On the contrary, they are enemies which, conquered, have already done the service of friends. To meet them face to face, to suffer at their hands, to rise superior to them, is to unite the soul in closer bonds of love with its Lord. Therefore, not *over* them, but *in* and *through* them, it becomes more than conqueror.

There are barren victories. "One more such," sometimes cries the military commander, "will cost me my army." I thank Thee, O Christ, that

there are none such in Thy service. Here the warfare itself enriches. Thy followers are drawn close together and closer to Thee, and are strengthened with strength in their souls, by every good fight of faith. Even the life of the patriot-soldier is promotive of certain great personal qualities—of reverence for authority, prompt obedience, hardihood of will, love of country. And not without significance was the fact that of a Roman soldier Jesus declared that He had found more faith in him than in any son of Israel. But here is only an imperfect prefigurement of the higher truth that in the Christian warfare and service there is complete spiritual development. So that the highest note of triumph at last shall be, not "I have conquered," but "I have attained"; not "My enemies are fallen, are fallen," but "Through Him that loved me, I am perfected." "More than conquerors"—yea, sons of God made perfect as such through conflict and suffering.

OPPORTUNITY AS REWARD

"I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut)."—*Rev. iii.* 8.

Contextual reading, vv. 7-13.

It is one of Christ's ways of rewarding fidelity. He enlarges the faithful servants' field of activity. Whatever they have already wrought in His cause, by so much is their capacity to work and serve increased; and inasmuch as they are now capable of doing more than ever, the opportunity is providentially offered them. It is so in this life; and the intimations of the New Testament, together with the argument from analogy, suggest that it will be so hereafter. "Because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things." So here, in the Lord's message to the Church in Philadelphia, which, alone of the Seven Churches, He charges with no unfaithfulness: "I know thy works—I have set before thee a door opened." It was the door of opportunity. It introduces these working Christians into some new sphere of life and service.

The reward of industry is another work to do. The reward of aspiration is a higher height. The reward of enterprise and faithfulness is opportunity. The wages of Virtue—

"Give her the wages of going on, and not to die."

Our souls, O Lord, with all their needs, hidden or manifest, are Thine own creation, and Thou knowest them altogether. Therefore, in wisdom hast Thou made the worker's reward suitable to his nature. I used to wonder why a man who had wrought one great successful work, should not rest and be satisfied. Why should Columbus have risked the perils of the deep for a second or a third voyage? Why should the author of one satisfactory book go toiling on to produce another and still another? A crude and thoughtless question, asked in ignorance of the soul of man. For does not the fact of the first achievement show love of achievement which can never be satisfied? The joy is in going on. The soul is touched with the passion of the infinite: it can never become, it can never do, enough to make itself willing to quit. In Thy service, my Master, may the door of opportunity be never, either here or hereafter, shut in my face.

HEARING FOR OTHERS' SAKE

"The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught."—*Isa. l.* 4.

Contextual reading, vv. 5-10.

It is a Messianic description. True in a measure of the prophet himself, it was true in all its fulness of that servant of Jehovah who should come, and who has come, as Prophet and Saviour. Therefore, to have the experience here recorded is to enter into the Christ-life. What is the experience? It is to waken, day after day, under the touch of the Divine Teacher, to be taught how to comfort and strengthen other people, and to learn words with which to sustain the weary-hearted. It is wakening, listening, hearing, in the secret place of the Most High, for others' sake.

Knowledge is good for the learner himself. If "the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun," the light of truth is sweeter and more satisfying. Knowledge may claim the

universe as its field, and uncounted ages as its learner's day. Look up into the starry spaces, and think what it must be to study and find out things, and see and know, forever. Yet there may be the dross of selfishness in the lover of knowledge. He may seek to know simply for the joy of knowing, and so for his own sake only. But not such is the divinely human way. The prophet would know that he may tell, gladly sharing the light of truth with his fellows. He would have "the tongue" as well as the mind of them that are taught.

To "sustain with words him that is weary." Shall we ask where to find such a one? Indeed, it needs no search. Like the poor, he is always with us. Had we eyes to see, he would even now appear in our home, and at our side. It may be one who freely speaks of his burden and asks the sympathy and counsel of friends. It may be one who wears a brave and cheerful face while his heart is nigh unto breaking. Verily it is a gracious gift of God to be a strength-giver to the troubled or the burdened soul. In fulfilment of all that went before, it was a ministry of the Christ. Whence came His words of strength and healing? "The word which ye hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." "The words which Thou gavest me, I have given unto them."

V THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH

"That disciple, therefore, whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord."—*John xxi.* 7.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-14.

In Jesus' reappearances after the Resurrection, nothing is more evident than that the passage through death had wrought no essential change upon His humanity. He showed the same care-taking toward the disciples, the same authority over their life and work, the same spirit of close and holy companionship, as before. "Go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me." "Come, and break your fast." He had laid down His life, and had taken it again.

Shall we not learn from Him who thus became the first-fruits of those that slept, the truth of the identity of personal being, and the persistence of love, here and on the other side of death? Said Bernard of Clairvaux, in the funeral sermon for his brother Gerard: "Thou hast discarded thine infirmities but not thine affections. 'Love never faileth'; thou wilt not forget me at the last." What is it that makes one's friend dear, or one's own life precious? Not circumstances, not place and time, not the tie of outward asso-

ciation, not the flesh: these are but the treasure-box in which lies the untold wealth. It is the real human self that gives the transcendent worth to life and love. And over this personal self death has no power. Out of the Divinely appointed sleep it will awake the same. Death is not the loss of personality. There are those whom I long with inexpressible longing to see again. The time that has intervened, with its long dreamy succession of days and nights, since they went away, has not dimmed the image of them I hold in my heart. Often has my spirit been prone to cry out with tears, that even for one short hour I might see their faces, and talk with them about many things, as in the days of long-ago. How welcome would they be this moment at my side!

> "Whatever change the years have wrought,
> I find not yet one lonely thought
> That cries against my wish for thee."

My Father and my God, Thou hast awakened this love and longing, unsubdued by time or death. Thou hast given me these brothers and sisters of the soul. Are they not in Thy keeping there, in the world of spiritual realities, as I in this fleeting world of flesh and time? Let me meet not another, but themselves again.

WHAT IS IT TO GLORIFY GOD?

"Now this He spake signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God."—*John xxi.* 19.

Contextual reading, vv. 15-23.

A GLORY is not something from without. It can come only from within. It is the outshining in splendour of some inner excellence. If one had the power thoroughly to analyse the rosebush in bloom, or the ruby's perpetual beauty, or the sun shining in his strength, one would doubtless find in the very constitution of its being the reason and source of its visible splendour. Similarly the glory of a man is not in the tasteful or gorgeous apparel that may be put upon him, nor in the beautiful house he may live in, but in the strength, or intelligence, or goodness that appears in his person and conduct. It is not a matter of clothing or habitation, but of nerve and muscle, or mind, or character.

Now if this is so, how can we glorify—that is to say, *make glorious*—any object, without somehow making it actually better than it is? Who, for example, could hope to glorify the sun? Can we add a single beam to its brightness? Kindle the whole earth into one electric flame, and see.

Nothing may be either added to or taken from the sun's glory.

But one may enlarge the sphere of the sun's shining. One may open the windows of a room and let the sunlight be spread abroad within, where all was dark before. Or, the oculist may remove a cataract from the diseased eye, and restore the irradiate earth and sky to sense-perception. Thus may the world of sunlight be enlarged by human hands, and the sun be thereby declaratively glorified.

"Signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Make God more excellent in Himself? The very interrogation seems almost profane. But suppose that we may so live —or die—as to make God known to those who knew Him not. Suppose that we may catch some beams of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God from the face of Jesus Christ, and reflect them into a sin-darkened soul. Suppose that we should so witness for God in purity and kindness of life, that some person might catch a new view of Him in whose heart all purity and kindness were born. That is to make God glorious to such a soul. And we were made for that. "I beseech Thee," said Moses, "show me Thy glory." But it was Moses' own calling, as it is every man's, in life and in death, to show forth God's glory.

BENEDICITE

"Praise ye Jehovah.
Praise God in His sanctaury;
Praise Him in the firmament of His power.
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. . . .
Let everything that hath breath praise Jehovah."
—*Psa. cl.* 1, 2, 6.

Contextual reading, the Psalm.

If it be asked, how sub-human creatures, "everything that hath breath," and even the inanimate firmament of heaven, may praise the Ever-Living One, the answer must be, that in fact they in their sphere are doing so more perfectly than we in ours. Because, obedient to their nature's law, they do the will of Him who made them, which is the highest note of praise that either creature or child of God can reach.

But their sphere has no such meaning and magnitude as ours. Theirs is a kingdom of the unconscious, the necessitated, the unmoral; ours, a kingdom of the spirit. They must fulfil the purpose of their creation, we may refuse; but fulfilling it, we offer to God a richer sacrifice of

thanksgiving than they. So it was a golden word of Chrysostom, "The true Shekinah is man." There may show forth more of the glory of God from the life of one good man than from all the "trees of the Lord" that blossom, or birds that sing, or starry worlds that shine.

> "Lift up your hearts."
> We lift them up unto the Lord."

Let His mighty acts and His excellent greatness in earth and sky find an articulate voice in our songs. With His holy Church universal, with all whose hearts have been kindled into grateful love, with the celestial multitude that no man can number, let us extol that Name which is above every name. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me." But the worship is perfected only when it becomes service, the words of praise in the sanctuary when they are bodied forth in deeds of kindness at home, adoration when it prepares the heart for ministration. In this showing forth of His praise in the daily doing of His will, let all His sons and daughters unite, treading with busy feet that path of obedience

> "Trodden one, O best of all!
> By the Feet at which we fall."

✓ *BENEDICTION*

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit."—*Rom. xv.* 13.

Contextual reading, vv. 1-12.

It is an apostolic benediction upon unseen friends. Paul had often intended to visit them, and had been hindered hitherto. But he sends them this letter, the greatest of all it had been given him to write, in which he pours forth without stint his knowledge of the "mystery" of the gospel, and his own constraining love. It was enough that they were his brethren in Christ: for love takes little account of intervening lands or seas, and is ever on the wing to reach and bless its objects.

Faith, joy, peace, hope—Paul could no more have imparted these blessings as from himself than he could have created a world. They are all thoughts of God, creations of His good will, gifts of His grace. But an Apostle, or any other Christian, might mediate a Divine blessing to his fellows. How?

By whatever words of truth he should write or speak, by coming to see them as he longs to

do, by love and sympathy and service, by the penetrating power of example, this chief pastor of the Christian people might become a means of the grace of God to them—and they, in like manner, even the humblest of them, to him. "That I with you may be comforted [strengthened] in you, each of us by the other's faith."

There are persons whom to be with awakens the sense of a divine presence. Human life as they live it, in faith and joy, in peace and hope, reflects a light not from the sun, but from the Father of lights, upon every sympathetic observer. They bring the unseen and hoped-for near. In their faces men see the Eternal.

Thou God of hope, it will be blessedness indeed, if Thou wilt make me in some little measure such a benediction to others.

THE END

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The listening heart

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